

ALFRED

MARCH 35¢ K

HITCHCOCK'S

MYSTERY MAGAZINE



NEW stories
presented by
the master
of **SUSPENSE**

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Dear Readers:

This is a month of rapid changes in temperatures and emotions. A flash of spring sunshine, though fragmentary, is followed by a sudden flurry of snow and the urge to bask in the sun on some distant beach overtakes us. As I live where it is always sunny, the desire to take off for the brisk, invigorating climes of snowcapped St. Moritz overtakes me. Hence the closeup on the cover which mirrors my innate satisfaction and beatific tranquility.

What a wonderful time I had with my family, seeing old familiar places, and friends. Don't picture me skiing alone on the mountainous slopes, pursued by a brandy-collared St. Bernard. Picture me instead being pursued through the snow by my grandchildren to whom snow is a thing of wonder.

While abroad we found Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine has quite a following. Some of our American ways are being absorbed by the continental young people, and I like to believe our little magazine is playing a part in this.

In this issue we have a quick remedy for all insomniacs . . . some homicidal, matricidal and fratricidal thrillers that will make you forget you cannot sleep.

Alfred Hitchcock

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ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S

mystery magazine

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RICHARD E. DECKER

Editor and Publisher

VICTORIA S. BENHAM, Associate Editor

G. F. FOSTER, Managing Editor

PAT HITCHCOCK, Associate Editor

NED BENHAM, Associate Editor

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WHEN Mrs. Kerley had her scene with Anita Lowe that Monday afternoon, she didn't know, of course, that it would be the last one. There would be no more scenes because she would never see Anita Lowe again.

But this last scene was worthy of the combatants. The other tenants had wondered for a while why Mrs. Kerley had allowed Anita Lowe to stay on in 2-A. But they finally understood why. Mrs. Kerley was a belligerent sort, happiest when she had the most to complain about, when she had someone to bawl and shout at. Mr. Kerley had served in that capacity until he wearied of it and died. After him came a succession of tenants, the present incumbent Anita Lowe. And why should Anita Lowe have endured Mrs.

Kerley? Because Mrs. Kerley allowed goings-on that other landladies wouldn't have. She allowed them, of course, so she could complain about them. A curious but satisfactory arrangement, all in all.

On that last afternoon—as far as anyone knows the last afternoon of Anita Lowe's life—the tenants in 1-B and 2-B heard at least portions of the scene. They may even have heard the beginning of it, which was Anita's knock on Mrs. Kerley's door.

Mrs. Kerley was sitting at her front window, her favorite observation post. The high school girl across the street was dawdling with a male youngster in tight blue jeans and leather jacket, and Mrs. Kerley was clucking in disapproval. The knock at the door was an interruption, and Mrs. Kerley went



When a landlady, with blackmail on her mind, tries to out-manuever a desperate man, she'd be wise to remember one sometimes has to think like a killer to catch one.

to answer the summons in a hostile mood.

Although it was four o'clock in the afternoon, Anita Lowe was standing there in a flimsy house-coat beneath which was an even flimsier nightgown. And she was barefooted.

Mrs. Kerley decided to smile. "Come in, dearie," she said. "You'll catch your death of cold out there in the hall." Sometimes she liked to invite people into her apartment, so that she could have the possible pleasure later of ordering them out.

But Anita, despite her knowledge of her landlady's character, accepted the invitation. She came in and sat tiredly on the sofa. Ordinarily quite pretty, almost beautiful, she was not at her best on this afternoon. She had made an attempt with a comb at her short blonde hair, she had dabbed at her mouth with lipstick, but no quick treatment could improve the slightly bloodshot condition of her eyes or the puffiness of her features. She looked as if she needed sleep badly, and maybe half a dozen aspirin.

"Now what's the trouble,

ONE BODY

by C. B. Gilford

my little fine-feathered friend?"

"Mrs. Kerley, I've just got to have a cup of coffee, and I forgot to get any when I was at the store yesterday."

Now why didn't Anita Lowe apply at 1-B or 2-B for a coffee loan? Mrs. Kerley knew the answer. Anita had done just that very thing dozens of times, had never remembered to return the borrowed property, and so had run out of credit. Whereas here at her place, due to their peculiar relationship, Anita might have to accept a piece of Mrs. Kerley's mind, but stood a chance of getting the coffee along with it.

"Instant, if you have any," Anita added.

A mood of diabolical generosity was upon Mrs. Kerley. "I'll go you one better than that," she said. "I'll fix you a cup right here."

Anita tried to protest, but her hostess was not to be denied. Mrs. Kerley exited to the kitchen, leaving Anita fumbling vainly in her pocket for a cigarette. That was luxury Mrs. Kerley didn't furnish. But she did have the instant variety of coffee. The water boiled quickly. Mrs. Kerley brought down two cups and two saucers from her good china, spooned coffee, poured the steaming liquid over it, and returned to the living room in swift triumph.

Anita needed the refreshment too much to brood over the curious fact of having an afternoon tete-a-tete with her landlady. She sipped desperately at the coffee, ignoring its temperature.

"You needed a little pick-up, is that it?" Mrs. Kerley asked.

The blonde girl didn't even bother to nod.

"Must have had quite a late night, eh?"

That jolted Anita to attention. She knew Mrs. Kerley's opinion of late nights. "Oh, I didn't just get up, if that's what you mean," she said quickly. "I was up early. But then I got this awful headache, so I lay down for a nap. And I woke up with a worse headache than ever."

Mrs. Kerley smiled with sweet understanding. "It figures," she said.

Anita Lowe suffered from a psychosis which demanded that she conceal her guilt with loud protests of innocence. "If you mean," she answered haughtily, "that you think I had something to drink last night, you're very wrong."

But Mrs. Kerley, enjoying herself immensely, was off in a slightly different direction. "Arthur . . . Mr. Lowe . . . is on quite an extended trip this time, isn't he? Been gone for how long now?"

"Two weeks," Anita answered.
"Gets lonesome, doesn't it?"

Anita had been accused before, but she'd never gotten used to it. "Sure it gets lonesome," she answered hotly. "I'm so crazy about Arthur . . ."

At that Mrs. Kerley threw back her head and laughed derisively.

"If Arthur only had a job where he didn't have to travel . . ."

Mrs. Kerley laughed again.

"Shut up, you old hag!"



Such a frank expression of opinion from a guest was surprise enough to Mrs. Kerley. But what happened next was even more surprising, and more painful. There was half a cup of still hot coffee in Anita Lowe's hand. In the next instant, the coffee left the cup, sailed through the air, and splashed on Mrs. Kerley, some of it on her face, the rest down the front of her dress not quite scalding, but decidedly warm.

For a few seconds Mrs. Kerley was immobilized by shock. Long enough for Anita to dash the good china cup and saucer to the floor, to stride to the door, open it, and disappear into the hallway. When Mrs. Kerley herself finally leaped up and managed the door, all she saw of Anita was a wisp of night-gown disappearing around the turn of the stairs.

Frustrated in her pursuit, Mrs. Kerley could only bellow. "Get out of my apartment, you hussy! You can pack up and leave right now, you trollop!" She screamed other names also, more colorful and more explicit.

Anita, of course, slammed and bolted the door of 2-A and didn't return to the fray. Mrs. Pearson, however, came down from 2-B, and Mrs. Schwartz peeked out from 1-B, and were treated to a sight of Mrs. Kerley's coffee-drenched face and bosom and an account of the battle.

"Do you see what she did to me?" Mrs. Kerley wailed.

Mrs. Pearson and Mrs. Schwartz saw and sympathized.

"And broke a nice cup and saucer of mine too."

"The one with the rose buds?" Mrs. Pearson asked in horror.

"With the rose buds. She'll pay for this!"

Mrs. Schwartz ducked back in-

side 1-B as soon as she could. Mrs. Pearson edged slowly up the stairs and escaped at the next opportunity. Mrs. Kerley was left alone again in the lower hallway, still hurling imprecations upward for another full ten minutes, taunting her enemy to come back down again. Gradually then, by slow stages, as the formidable dame slowly succumbed to exhaustion, the building quieted down.

Mrs. Kerley brooded the rest of that afternoon. That brooding was important because it kept her wakeful. She saw a little bit with her cat's eyes that functioned rather well even in the dark. But she heard a lot more with ears that were attuned to the significant squeaking of floorboards.

It was eight-thirty and after dark, for instance, when the car appeared across the street, lights off, waiting. It could have been the blue jeans boy after the high school girl, but it wasn't. It wasn't that sort of car.

Within seconds of Mrs. Kerley's spotting the car, there were meaningful sounds from upstairs in 2-A. Sharp, staccato cracklings on the floor. Anita Lowe's spike heels. Then the hallway door of 2-A stealthily opening and closing.

Mrs. Kerley had a decision to make then. Whether or not to intercept Anita at the foot of the

stairs, expose her infidelity to the neighborhood in loud tones, and demand immediate evacuation of her premises. But then supposing that the new tenant would turn out to be an innocent, shy, uninteresting little creature, someone impossible to find fault with? Still, there was that cup-of-coffee incident . . .

While Mrs. Kerley thus vacillated, Anita Lowe slipped down the stairs, out through the front door, down the walk, and across the street to the waiting car. The dome light flashed on momentarily while Anita's red-clad torso wriggled inside. There was a man at the wheel, of course.

"That hussy!" Mrs. Kerley spat out bitterly.

The night wore on. 1-B and 2-B were quiet. The Pearsons and the Schwartzes never went out. Overhead, 2-A was empty. The forsaken wife was being consoled elsewhere. Mrs. Kerley found sleep, even catnapping, impossible.

Then very suddenly, a new, unexpected sound brought Mrs. Kerley to a fully erect position in her rocking chair. Someone was inside the lower hall and on the stairs. Anita and her boy friend. No, there was only one person. Anita by herself. No, the step seemed different.

Up the stairs, and in the hall-

way above. A key grating in the lock of 2-A. The door opening and closing. Footsteps. A man's. Heavier and no spike heels. But no sound of a light switch clicking. Whoever it was, was moving around 2-A in the dark.

A burglar, Mrs. Kerley thought, gripping the chair arms in terror. But she calmed quickly. The man had had a key, so he couldn't be a buglar. And he was walking around confidently up there in the dark. It had to be Arthur Lowe.

But why in the dark?

Mrs Kerley didn't know why, but the puzzle of it kept her listening with intense concentration. Arthur Lowe went into every room up there in 2-A. Looking for his wife obviously. And failing to find her, of course. Finally sitting down on the sofa. Mrs. Kerley heard the squeak of springs and the squish of cushions.

Arthur Lowe was sitting up there, waiting for his wife to come home. And he was sitting in the dark!

Mrs. Kerley was becoming excited now. Judging entirely by the sounds she could guess at the situation. Arthur Lowe had returned secretly, since Anita hadn't been expecting him. But he'd also returned stealthily. He hadn't expected to find his wife at home, but he'd searched to make sure.

And now he was waiting for her, but he didn't want to warn her that he was waiting. Hence no lights.

Gloating, Mrs. Kerley could picture him up there on the sofa. Arthur Lowe, meek and mild-mannered, not too tall, sloped-shouldered and perhaps a bit thin. His blue eyes peering from behind their spectacles unseeing into the darkness. What was the expression in those eyes, on his pale face?

Poor Arthur Lowe. He worked hard and made good money. But to make the money he had to travel. So he could afford to support Anita, but he could seldom be home to enjoy her company. What he'd really been doing all this time then was supporting her for the benefit of other men. And now—well, he'd either discovered that fact suddenly, or having realized it all along, he'd finally decided to do something about it.

What was that something going to be? Mrs. Kerley trembled with anticipation. She wasn't going to be there to see it happen, but hearing and imagining it would be the next best thing.

The night was a long one. Mrs. Kerley watched the illuminated hands of her alarm clock go around and around. From above, Arthur Lowe gave no indication that he was even alive. The sofa

hadn't squeaked once since he'd first sat down on it. He was a patient man all right. But now apparently his patience was at an end.

It was three-thirty—Mrs. Kerley marked the time—when the car returned with Anita in it. Even at that late hour, however, it didn't disgorge its passenger right away. Mrs. Kerley grew almost frantic as the minutes slowly passed. It was almost four when the car door finally opened, the dome light flashed, and Anita in her red dress squirmed out. No, the man didn't attempt to come in with her. Anita knew what Mrs. Kerley would do if he tried that—she'd call the police.

The front door opened, a little noisily, a little clumsily. Anita probably thought her landlady was asleep. Up the stairs, a little wobbly on the spike heels. Fumbling with the key, finally getting the door open. No clicking of a light switch this time either. Anita was probably finding the darkness easier on her eyes.

Then it came. A man's voice, low and soft. Just a word or two. A little scream of surprise from Anita, hushed, muffled, not loud enough to wake anybody in any of the other apartments. A few seconds of silence, then a jumble of voices, husband and wife talking

at the same time. But still, each for his or her own reason, quietly enough to avoid arousing the neighbors.

What were they saying to each other? What were Arthur's accusations, and how did Anita try to defend herself? Surely he didn't believe her for one moment. Mrs. Kerley strained to hear some words, but failed. She wished she had secret microphones set up in all the apartments, so she could listen in on all her tenants' conversations.

It went on how long? Maybe five minutes. Then the sofa squeaked. Arthur Lowe had risen to his feet. The noise level of the voices rose a little too, changed pitch a little, became shriller. It was mostly Anita's voice now. Could Mrs. Kerley be sure? Did Anita sound afraid? Was she finally realizing that Arthur meant business?

Silence. It happened so quickly that at first Mrs. Kerley thought she had lost her hearing. The argument upstairs had ended like a television play cut off by a blown picture tube. Action one moment, absolutely nothing the next.

Bursting with curiosity, Mrs. Kerley almost started to run upstairs to look for the cause of the sudden stillness. Surely they weren't in each other's arms, kissing! Surely Arthur had more gump-

tion and spunk than that . . .

No, there were sounds again. Couldn't follow their significance. A sofa squeak. But not made by Arthur, because Arthur's footsteps began wandering around the apartment. Almost aimlessly, it seemed. Mrs. Kerley could detect no pattern in the movements. One light switch clicked finally. On, then right off again. Darkness. Arthur Lowe was pacing around in complete darkness. While Anita sat on the sofa.

No . . . the sofa was squeaking again. Then something going across the floor that wasn't footsteps. Was something being dragged? A piece of furniture? Living room to bedroom, and stopping there. Another squeak, unidentifiable. A thump. Squeaks again. Clicks.

Back to the sofa. Arthur's footsteps. Sitting down. Silence. Getting up again. More pacing. Just Arthur though. Anita had neither moved nor spoken for a long while now. It was nearly five o'clock, close to dawn.

Finally, just when Mrs. Kerley thought it never would, the pacing ceased. Arthur was at the door. Opening and shutting it. The click of the automatic lock. Arthur's footsteps coming down the stairs. Out the front door. From the window Mrs. Kerley watched him.

He must have parked his car a distance away, perhaps to conceal his presence, because now he merely walked down the sidewalk and disappeared.

Well! That was strange, wasn't it? Arthur had come and gone, but what had he accomplished? Mrs. Kerley had been hoping to hear the sounds of blows, then of Anita's cries of pain. But there'd been nothing.

Mrs. Kerley didn't sleep. She listened for Anita, but didn't hear her. Mrs. Kerley was confused now. Anita definitely wasn't in bed. But was she on the sofa? Dawn came without that question being answered.

It was a miserable day for Mrs. Kerley. About noon, when she had the chance of doing it unobserved, she went upstairs and knocked at the door of 2-A. No result. After that, rather than climb the stairs again, she phoned. She could hear the bell ring up in 2-A. And ring and ring.

Anita Lowe had not left the apartment. Of that Mrs. Kerley could be certain. Arthur had departed alone. But long hours had passed now, and no sign of Anita.

With the coming of darkness again, Mrs. Kerley succumbed to exhaustion. But she slept only lightly, her ears tuned to possible noise from 2-A. When she woke in

the morning, she was as certain as if she'd never slept at all, that 2-A had continued quiet as a tomb.

That was the morning when the long-distance telephone call came. Arthur Lowe was on the other end of the wire. His voice was mild, calm, matter-of-fact. "Mrs. Kerley? This is Arthur Lowe."

"Yes, Mr. Lowe," Mrs. Kerley tried to keep from sounding excited.

"Mrs. Kerley, my wife has just joined me here and has decided to stay with me for a while. We'll keep the apartment, of course. I'll mail the rent. But there are some things my wife would like to have, and they're all in that fancy trunk of hers upstairs. You know, the one with the flowers painted on it. Well, would you do us a favor? Call the express man, let him into our apartment, have him pick up the trunk, and ship it to us collect."

He rattled off the precise address then, and in a daze Mrs. Kerley wrote it down. Automatically, because Arthur Lowe was so insistent, she promised to do as he requested. Then he hung up.

Mrs. Kerley dashed up the stairs a pair at a stride. Her duplicate key opened the door of 2-A quickly. Inside, her eye made a hasty inspection. There was nothing disturbed or awry.

She walked from the living room into the bedroom. There at the foot of the double bed was the trunk. Not a large one, maybe three or three and a half feet long, less than two wide and maybe two deep. It was painted green with an overlay of red roses. There was no need for Mrs. Kerley even to touch the thing to realize that it was securely locked.

She knew the whereabouts of Anita Lowe then.

The murder had occurred on Monday night. Or more precisely, a bit before dawn on Tuesday morning. On Wednesday morning Arthur Lowe had phoned long-distance. It was on the following Monday that the special-delivery letter came, urgently repeating the request for the trunk, and pleading, if it had already been shipped, for Mrs. Kerley to check on its progress. As she had with the phone call, Mrs. Kerley ignored it.

She had made up her mind on the subject. She wasn't mourning the death of Anita Lowe. In fact, she rejoiced in it. Only justice had been done. Consequently she had no desire to turn Arthur Lowe over to the police.

But there was herself to consider. She had suffered a great deal at Anita's hands. The incident

of the coffee had been merely the last, not the first. Things like that demanded justice too. Payment. And now that Arthur Lowe didn't have Anita's present demands to meet, he could well afford to settle her past debts. Mrs. Kerley hadn't decided on the exact amount. But she knew she could collect it. Because she had possession of the trunk.

Mrs. Kerley had begun to enjoy the sense of power that trunk gave her. If a psychologist had gotten hold of Mrs. Kerley, he might ultimately have concluded that this thirst for power was the real reason why Mrs. Kerley enjoyed being a landlady. It allowed her to control the roof over people's heads, to make rules, to enforce those rules. So even though she had her eye on turning a profit eventually, at the moment Mrs. Kerley enjoyed her blackmail scheme for its own sake.

Come to think of it, she didn't care much more for Arthur Lowe than she had for his wife. Hadn't he been the one who'd complained about the lack of janitor service? Justice, that was all that Mrs. Kerley wanted. Justice.

Airily she consigned Arthur Lowe's special delivery to the wastebasket, and sat down to pen him a teasing little note. "Dear Mr. Lowe: In answer to your letter

concerning your wife, I feel that I am able to put your mind at ease. Don't worry about Mrs. Lowe for one minute. She is in good hands. You can trust me completely. I'll keep an eye on her for you. She isn't able to write to you at the moment, which is why I'm writing instead. But I thought you might be interested to know. Your wife doesn't go out any more at all. She seems quite satisfied to stay at home. So don't worry. Sincerely, Emma Kerley."

That would bring him running, she thought. Make him sweat too. Make him realize that Emma Kerley was no amateur in little intrigues like this. She was a clever woman, so there was no use in his trying to figure out ways of getting around her.

Arthur Lowe arrived back in town within twenty-four hours. He didn't come by daylight. She hadn't expected him to. He came under cover of darkness, after midnight.

She heard him come through the front door, recognized his tread on the stairs. She heard him try his key, and afterwards test the stoutness of the door. Finally he descended the stairs again, knocked at her door.

"Come in, Mr. Lowe," she called.

He entered quickly, shut the

door behind him in haste. Then he stood there staring at her, his thick spectacles enlarging his eyes till he looked rather like a thin, pale frog. He was a calm customer, but Mrs. Kerley had expected that, what with the quiet, efficient way he had murdered Anita, then walked off leaving her body in the trunk and trusting his landlady and a truck driver to get rid of it for him.

"The lock's been changed on the door of my apartment," he said. Mrs. Kerley nodded.

"Why?"

"To protect the contents."

"I suppose you're the only one who has the key."

Mrs. Kerley nodded again.

"I should have known." He licked his lips. There was a film of sweat over his face, which accentuated the frog look. "Well then, shall we be frank with each other, Mrs. Kerley?"

She really didn't know Arthur Lowe very well, had never had much contact with him. She found herself wondering again just how he had killed Anita. She had decided on strangling, since there'd been no noise, and no sign of blood anywhere. She glanced at his hands now. They were small, pale. Of course he'd been very angry at Anita.

"That was a cleverly worded

letter, Mrs. Kerley. But it omitted one important point. You've seized my property. What is your price for returning it?"

She rocked slowly in her rocking chair. "I'm not a greedy woman," she told him. "I merely want to be repaid for the mistreatment and the insults I got from your wife. I was patient with her for a long time, Mr. Lowe. I protected your good name. And I want to go on protecting your good name, Mr. Lowe. But I just want something for my trouble, that's all."

"How much?"

"We don't have to haggle. Some nice, round, convenient figure. Say ten thousand dollars."

He almost smiled, it seemed. She wasn't quite sure. "I don't have anywhere near that much money," he said.

"You could get it."

"I don't know how."

"I'll give you a little time. Your wife is being well taken care of meanwhile, as I said in my letter."

"Yes, your letter . . ."

"Don't get the idea you can break down that door in the middle of the night, Mr. Lowe. I'm a very light sleeper. I would simply call the police."

"Yes, the police . . ."

"But don't delay too long, Mr. Lowe." She was a little peeved that he wasn't cowering before her.

"Your wife . . . your property . . . is still occupying my apartment. Starting tomorrow, the rent is a thousand dollars a day. Besides the ten thousand, that is."

His enormous eyes were expressionless. "I could always let you foreclose," he said.

"Then I would lose," she admitted. "But you wouldn't gain. Because the law would collect."

There didn't seem to be anything more to talk about after that. Arthur Lowe's frog stare was an uncomfortable thing to have to look back at, but Mrs. Kerley forced herself to do it.

"I'll be waiting right here whenever you have the money," she told him.

He didn't bother to say good-bye. He slipped out through the door quietly. She switched off the lamp, so she could watch him as he left the building. His car was nowhere in sight. He merely walked away, as he'd done the night he'd murdered Anita.

It was then, for the first time, that Mrs. Kerley shivered. For the first time her nerve began to crack. She almost threw open the window and shouted for him to come back and take that green trunk. She wanted to call the police and report her "suspicion".

But the weakness passed quickly. Yes, she was dealing with a

murderer. Not a hardened murderer though. And Arthur Lowe couldn't dispose of her as easily as he'd disposed of his wife. Granted, he might feel like killing her. But as Arthur Lowe had already discovered, murder is a complicated business. His first murder he'd planned to conceal by shipping the body off in a trunk. But what would he do with a second body?

Surely it couldn't be squeezed into the same trunk!

The thought seized Mrs. Kerley like a python attacking its prey. It wrapped its slimy coils around her, opened its jaws and tried to swallow her. She fought back, in panic at first, then gradually with some small logic.

Wasn't Arthur Lowe's whole problem the disposal of corpses? And he had only one trunk. One can't carry a body around in a hat-box or a suitcase. Mrs. Kerley reflected, receiving some comfort from it, that she was no small woman. She was a good fifty pounds heavier than Anita had been, and bulkier in proportion. It was impossible to fit two bodies into that trunk. Wasn't it? Well, the thing to do was to take another look at that trunk and to see.

Once the resolve was made she acted quickly upon it. She went to the silver vase where the key to the new lock was hidden, and

ished it out. Then a flashlight. She didn't want to turn the lights on upstairs. It wouldn't do to attract Arthur Lowe's attention if he were still hanging around.

She ascended the stairs silently, having learned long ago how to move with stealth. The new key made a slight noise in the new lock, but it worked easily. The door was much worse. The squeak of its hinges was loud and raucous in Mrs. Kerley's ears, making her realize suddenly and for the first time why it had always been so easy for her to keep track of Anita's comings and goings.

Well, the only thing to do then to avoid more of that squeaking than absolutely necessary was to

keep the door ajar. She'd only be a moment. She merely wanted another close look at that trunk, to measure it with her eyes, get a better idea of its capacity.

She entered the living room, the flashing beam probing ahead of her. Quickly to the bedroom. Yes, the trunk was still there.

It was an ugly thing really. The green was of a ghastly shade, and the roses garish and too red. Or perhaps it only seemed so, because Mrs. Kerley knew that the trunk was actually a coffin and the colors were not befitting a coffin.

Never mind that though. Her mind was wandering. What about the size? Three and a half feet long, wasn't it? Or maybe four? Why hadn't she remembered to bring along her measuring tape? Length didn't matter though. A body could be doubled up. Two of them? How deep was the trunk? Two feet anyway. Now if you intertwined arms and legs . . . with her knees in Anita's face, and Anita's knees . . .

It could be done!

The terror struck at Mrs. Kerley then. She wanted to scream, and actually tried to, but managed only a dry croak. Why was she afraid? Of the trunk? No, more than that. The squeaking! Yes, squeaking. The hallway door was being pushed farther open. She was



trapped! He was here! Trapped!

She heard footsteps now, soft across the living room rug. What a fool she'd been. She'd let him in, made it easy for him. Why, he wouldn't even have to drag her body to the trunk. She was standing right beside it. And this time there'd be no witness downstairs to eavesdrop on the sounds of murder.

She was going to be murdered! Would he bury the trunk? She and Anita Lowe together in the same grave! Why couldn't she scream? Mrs. Pearson . . . Mrs. Schwartz . . . somebody . . .

Suddenly it was no longer dark. She heard the click first, and then the ceiling light flooded on. She whirled to face her murderer.

But Arthur Lowe wasn't alone. Two men were behind him, two men who looked somehow like detectives. And Arthur Lowe was the one who was screaming.

"Officers, look in that trunk! See if she put my wife in there . . ."

The circumstantial evidence all

pointed in the wrong direction. The doctors set the date of death rather accurately, and Arthur Lowe was out of town at that time, and nobody could prove otherwise. If there'd been a long-distance phone call, as Mrs. Kerley claimed, it must have been from a pay booth, so there was no record of it. As for the letter, she'd thrown that away.

On the other hand, Mrs. Pearson and Mrs. Schwartz seemed to take a certain satisfaction in describing the trouble between Mrs. Kerley and Anita Lowe on the very day the doctors said Anita Lowe had died. And they hadn't seen Anita since either. They could picture it, all right. Mrs. Kerley had always been a little crazy, and she'd had a violent temper.

The worst thing, of course, was the letter which Arthur Lowe had thoughtfully waved. After all. "Your wife doesn't go out any more at all," and such. Who would know things like that except the person who'd murdered Anita Lowe?

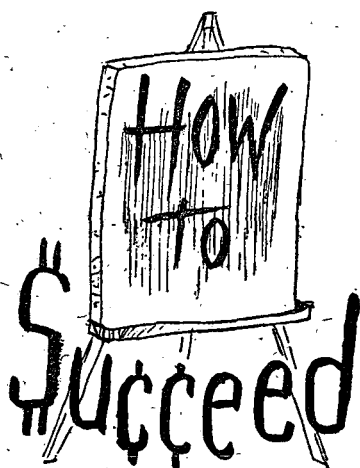


SPRING gets in your eyes, it may sell you a bill of goods. But who'd go blindfold in April?

The sycamores in Washington Square were still in that earliest yellow-green, springtime-in-Paris haze, but already the first small coffee-house had set up its sidewalk café, where a solitary couple sat and held hands from noon to one every day but Sunday, and never spent a cent. Again the dependably gale-strength winds of the spring Outdoor Art Show had laid low with pneumonia the same two older painters; but artists are lucky, they don't learn from experience, they can go right on dreaming. And Ottavio Amato, a carefree young blond Italian painter and sculptor, had met Moira Flaherty; and fallen in love with her bones.

If poetry is what makes the beard bristle, then Moira Flaherty's skull, armature for the highlighted convexities and the shadowed hollows of that exquisite face, was, to Ottavio Amato, **THE INVICTUS**, and **SAY NOT THE STRUGGLE**, and every throat-aching ode in the anthologies. He was tuned that way, high; a song for children's voices. No morning had ever been thought of before. Anything could happen.

Moira, a Modigliani-designed Brooklyn girl, raised in the discon-

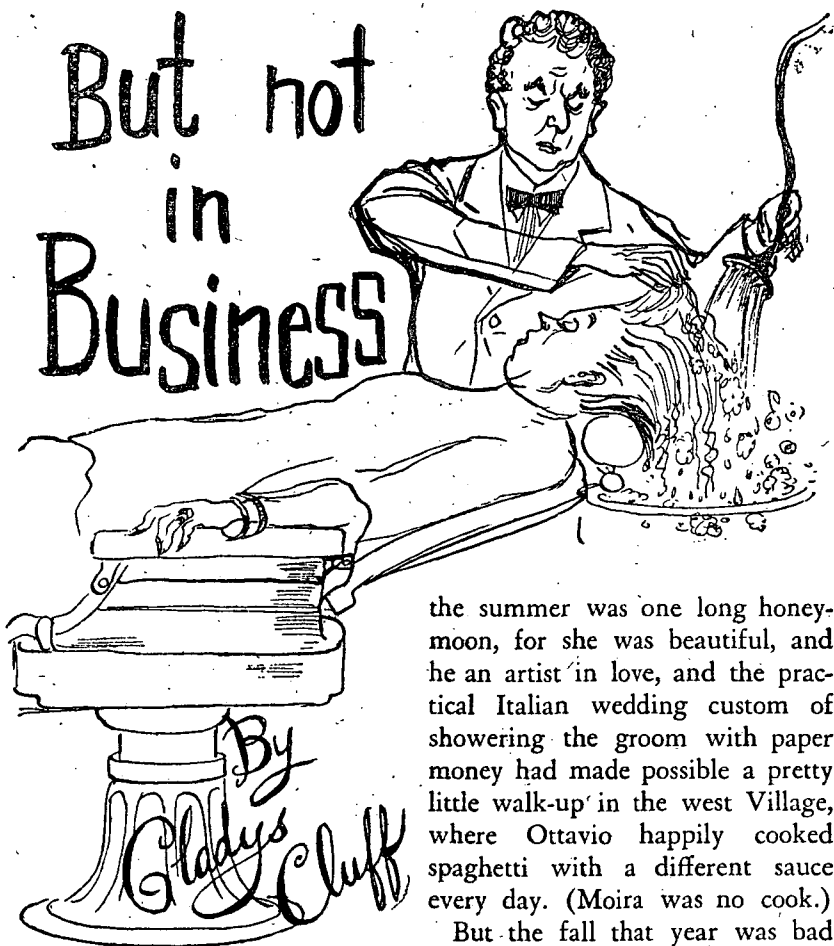


solate odor of tomorrow-will-be-worse, responded one hundred percent to eyes that glowed blue at everything they saw, herself, agreeably, in particular. When their exuberant owner introduced her that very first night to his painter friends Leo and Bernie, and they all four had spaghetti and meatballs and red wine at Minetta's, where the talk was vitally of new techniques, and picture sales (potential), and prizes (at the next show for sure) that could *make* a man—and the waiter loaned Ottavio two dollars as if he were investing in the future of American Culture, Inc.—Moira, who was twenty, recognized the authentic language of Success. Ambition raced the new wine through her veins.

They were married in June, and

"Stonewalls do not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage". Conversely, not every creative soul can be fruitful under the frustrations of personal freedom. One man's problem is worked to an astonishing conclusion herein.

But not in Business



the summer was one long honeymoon, for she was beautiful, and he an artist in love, and the practical Italian wedding custom of showering the groom with paper money had made possible a pretty little walk-up in the west Village, where Ottavio happily cooked spaghetti with a different sauce every day. (Moir was no cook.)

But the fall that year was bad luck; windy *and* rainy plus a nasty dispiriting virus; nobody

came downtown to the Art Show even for a Sunday saunter.

Now it is on these two big annual shows that the Village painters gamble their whole year's work. Then Greenwich Village really does look like Paris, with wide Fifth Avenue leading elegantly clear to the Stanford White Arch, and through it Washington Square showing green, or confetti-colored with folksingers gaudy as gypsies; every street from Tenth to Bleeker and from Broadway to The Avenue Of The Americas is lined with artwork and with the artists themselves, or their lean wives, sitting hopefully beside their wares. The Show *is* a show, as well as a place to pick up any kind of picture you can name—or can't. A spell of bad weather, though, can kill it. Philosophically Ottavio and his friends hung back their merchandise in the local restaurants for another six months and ordered no meat-balls with their spaghetti for the duration, as they had done before.

But Moira took alarmed stock. This was not what she had had in mind at all. She must have made quite a bad mistake about painting. Well then, no more painting.

But never in his life had Ottavio done, or wanted to do, anything *but* paint. Precisely what could he do supposing he did want to

"bring home some money, be a husband," as his wife and her mother and her brothers and sister-in-law put it?

"We'll have to find out," pronounced that little wife sadly, and with surprising administrative determination she arranged for him to take an Aptitude Test through New York University. From this he emerged with an astonishing aptitude for almost everything, in view of which, concluded Ottavio, whose IQ turned out to be 160, he guessed he might as well stick to art. Leonardo had had the same confusing diversity of talents, and look where he got with art.

Moira couldn't understand liking any work, so she wasn't choosy; she was just in a hurry to get her bread-winner started doing something people paid you for. Moira got an address from her cousin Nell, who had changed her name recently to Nadine and opened a Beauty Salon in the east thirties, and signed Ottavio up for a crash course in hairdressing. "You can practise on me and save a lot of time, and as soon as you get your certificate Nadine says she'll take you on!"

Ottavio was outraged. *Practise on her?* Sacrilege! That classic head was for the reverence of the artist, not the gross commercial handling of a hairdresser. And

Moira—it was flattery that got in Moira's eyes—Moira accepted this graciously, as a matter of course. She never asked him again. But even without homework Ottavio showed such conspicuous aptitude in class that when he was graduated, cum outstanding laude, and went to work at Nadine's, within a week he was billed on a two-foot square card in the window as MR. OTTAVIO OF ROME.

At the end of the second week he quit. "It's just not for me, honey," he announced when he arrived home early and not too conveniently. Bowling his beautician's kit, a discreet black attaché case, vigorously under the bed, he pulled out from the same limbo his dusty easel. "I *like* to paint." His eyes shone morning-glory blue. "Mama mia, how I like to paint! Tonight we celebrate, Mrs. Amato. Your husband is an artist again!"

But the celebration fell flat. Moira didn't much care for spaghetti neat. By Monday she had lined up another salon vacancy (Nadine was too huffy for approach again so soon), the easel was back collecting dust under the bed—and Ottavio, a good husband, was back making money.

Gloomily he accepted conditions, this time for his full, contracted month. Oh, he was gratifyingly respected at this new shop, too;

he could wind more heads a day than any operator there, and give a haircut that was a revelation; all the customers asked for Mr. Ottavio, he worked overtime nearly every night. Worked earnestly, meticulously—and without pride. His eyes lost that expectant shine, they didn't look so blue, and between them a little crease began to come and go. For now he knew—how can a young man know this and remain young?—that every new day would be just like every old one. Mornings were no longer fresh, they had been breathed before. His feet burned so by the time he got home that all he felt up to doing was to shuck off his black (regulation) shoes and pull loose the stiffened toes of his black (regulation) socks, and stretch his legs out on the coffee table. For the first time in his life Ottavio Amato didn't even *talk* about painting. And for the first time no brother painters dropped in of an evening to talk shop and trade gossip over a glass of wine with maybe half a ripe peach in it, and a wedge of cheese on the side.

Moira had long since realized that success is no jolly mutual admiration society; it is a serious business. So now, when for the second time her husband came home to announce cheerily that he had quit his job, she explained

this fact of life; barely had he slanted his eyes toward under-the-bed than she warned, "Ah-ah! None of that now!"

"What? I was only going to get my paint things . . ."

"I'm afraid that's over, 'Tavio."

"What's over, what are you talking about?"

"The only thing we ever talk about. Painting."

"Painting! Over!"

"It simply isn't a Business, I should think you could work that out for yourself."

He was speechless.

"It's back to Nadine's for you, my lad. I'll fix that up tomorrow."

"I tell you I *hate* hairdressing! My hands hate it! It insults them!" His voice went high, as if it had been pushed beyond some private, just discovered limit, and was crying all alone out there. "I *hate* heads!"

But Moira, faced by this newly stubborn Ottavio, cried. She worked herself up into genuine hysteria, screaming and scratching if he came near her. Nothing would quiet her until he promised, stunned and guilty and frantic, to do anything she said.

That night Ottavio cautiously slept on the couch. At least he lay there and puzzled. What had happened to his nice world?

At three o'clock he got up and

stole into the bedroom and stood looking at Moira asleep. It happened that he never had seen his wife so before; he always went to sleep first. This way, like marble, she was even more beautiful. This was the real Moira, *his* Moira. Quiet. Perfect. From along an edge of the too narrow shade a slit of moonlight found her upturned face and one bare smooth shoulder as she lay there, so touchingly vulnerable. Her throat was in shadow but his hands knew that warm little pulsating hollow; his sculptor fingers felt it now.

Love. Hate. They made a man feel just about the same way. You could love a girl, you could hate a girl, like two halves of the same thing. But that couldn't be, could it? Ottavio didn't know. He was not a thinker, he was a doer; with his hands. His feelings, the little habits that made his daily life, the big decisions that changed its course, all were translated by his hands.

A long time Ottavio stood motionless, looking at Moira, feeling that shadowed throat secret in his hands that hung now self-consciously idle. He touched, curved his palm around her cool, uncovered shoulder. Protectively, without thinking at all, he covered it with the warm blanket. Then, satisfied, he tiptoed back to bed. He slept

peacefully, not dreaming one bit.

Three days later, his forelock depressed wetly into a "sweet" marcel—that was Moira—and his shining morning face a thunder cloud, Mr. Ottavio of Rome checked back into Nadine's.

His first customer was the boss, Nadine herself, who was going to a very social wake that night, she said, and wanted to look terrific. Then every half hour from ten o'clock on, his hands massaged heads, washed heads, color-rinsed heads, wound heads, combed out heads; from this antic angle and that he crouched, grimacing—like a blooming clown, he bitterly accused his image in the mirror—to determine the very highest IQ answer to a head with indentations like the craters of the moon, or else with nothing you could treat as hair at all, just an apricot-colored mold. Ingratiatingly his voice suggested, his hands patted, his teeth bared to assure admiration; and his eyes watched, seeming not to watch, the finished head bend over a purse for the tip, loathsomely personal: head to hairdresser.

It was three o'clock when the phone rang. Nadine was called. Nadine said, "Certainly, Mrs. Delahanty."—And told Ottavio he would have to fit Delahanty in between his last two customers of the day.

Running him overtime. Again.

It was four thirty-five when every operator froze, and every head came out from under its drier, at an aborted scream, followed by the merest echo of a gurgle, small as three little glass beads. And then tangible, unnatural silence. From Ottavio's head. Delahanty.

Lathered and oddly tiny-looking, of a surprising conical shape, it bent back over the head-board too acutely; the effect was of something detached: a little melon on a broken stem. The veined eyes were rolled up, the indelibly rouged mouth stretched wide in still-born protest.

When the shocked hands of Ottavio disassociated themselves, stiffly, from that yellow neck, they bore irrefutable witness in the eyes of twenty persons who watched, *witness to murder.*

Ottavio stood expressionless, as though enchanted, staring at those hands that could do anything, anything at all, so professionally; even the very first time.

"Strangled her!" gasped a near-sighted young girl, jamming on corroborative glasses, yanking a green satin beret down over a headful of yellow and blue plastic rollers. "Choked her to death! A psycho!" From her own throat a sob sounded final as a shot, as she

and every other customer in the room grabbed up purses and ran, wet-haired or dry, one barefooted, a shoe in each hand, with tufts of cotton sticking up between glistening tangerine toe-nails, for the door.

"Get a doctor!" shrieked Nadine, who was standing by the only telephone, to the huddle of terrified operators at the other end of the room. "Call the Police!"

Ottavio, ripping off, *repudiating* his grey smock as though it dripped live blood, walked unchallenged to the desk, picked up the receiver, and dialed.

"Operator, give me the police." He spoke urgently, but with calmness. "I want to report a murder." He gave the address and explained, as if this explained everything, "Four-thirty, Delahanty, seventeenth head. Thank you."

No one breathed, no one dared even look as though anything unusual were going on.

Swiftly Ottavio's eyes went from operator to operator, found the bouncy young man with the deep dimples, who all day long borrowed Ottavio's clean brushes. "There's a doctor's sign in a window half a block west," he directed this one. "Run. Both ways."

But they all knew the woman was dead. When the doctor came and confirmed this, Ottavio nod-

ded sorrowfully as though it were his own mother. When Homicide arrived he had packed his scissors, razor blades, clips and curlers, all his paraphernalia, neatly into the black attaché case; he asked Nadine to give it to Moira and to tell her he wouldn't be home. And saluting gravely the constellation of eyes that his, thank God—that was one thing—would never have to meet again, Ottavio of Rome walked out between two tall policemen as if he were just stepping across the street to listen to the Series for a beer's worth.

Everyone in the shop knew how Ottavio hated his heads, he made the most fearful faces when he worked. Five witnesses testified to having heard him speak of the deceased as a head to end all heads, when Nadine had crammed in this prestige client between his two final appointments.—"You know, running him overtime? Late home."

And he himself had reported the event *as a crime*.

Ottavio Amato was indicted for murder.

But in view of (in addition to the implied general lunacy of all artists) Ottavio's endlessly repeated, "Four-thirty, Delahanty, seventeenth head," the lawyer appointed by the Court to defend him made an unexpected and im-

passioned insanity plea, and rested.

Moirra and her mother and all her sisters-in-law burst into horrified tears unanimously. Mentally Ottavio doodled a frightening profile of the judge, in green chalk, which super-imposed itself over every face in the courtroom until he had to close his eyes; and was ordered sharply to open them.

Two alienists, after examining a cooperative but absolutely unreasonable Ottavio, who still, when asked any question, made that same gobble-de-gook answer, "Four-thirty, Delahanty, seventeenth head," concurred with the defense. The verdict was 'Not Guilty by reason of insanity. Accused not sane at the time the crime was committed.'

So Ottavio was sent, instead of to the dark dungeon he had been dreading—how can you paint in the dark?—to a big, bright, very friendly-type hospital, where Personnel actually appreciated his passion for painting, which is a highly regarded therapy and requires, conveniently, no partner—as does ping-pong, for instance—nor instruction nor supervision. Materials, even real canvas, were provided in abundance; the Thrift Shop donated just the sturdy, old-fashioned kind of easel he liked; and Ottavio painted. His friends, Leo and Bernie, at first uneasily

self-conscious in these surroundings, visited him oftener and oftener, even occasionally jealously snatched a length of canvas; they felt welcome here. And the painting came along marvelously; the boys hung a picture of his along with their own in the Show. It was beginning to seem to Ottavio almost like old times in the Village, with everybody so *for* him.

When he thought of Moirra that little vertical line would be there between his eyes, but she didn't come to see him; and, to tell the truth, he didn't think about her any oftener than he could help, for the memory of his marriage nagged at his peace of mind like a swallowed prune pit, a small hard lump of unfinished business. Perhaps he never had thought about Moirra herself, only about her bones, and their joining, and their felicitous packaging. Certainly beauty has its own intrinsic nobility, but what young man, least of all an artist, would believe how little it has to do with a functioning, two-way relationship? And poor Moirra wasn't much of a girl. Moirra was marginal.

One rainy day she did come. Ottavio's best friend on the staff, young Doctor Kuntz, ushered her in with rather a flourish. At first glance the girl, sulky and damp, had registered as on the droopy

side, until he really looked at her. Good Lord, that face belonged in a gallery, a Cathedral! "Mrs. Amato to see you, Ottavio!" But Ottavio finished blocking in triangular green shadow, and then looked up politely, waiting. Doctor Kuntz remembered that this friendly, co-operative patient was still listed as potentially dangerous. "I'll be in my office right across the hall," he suggested pointedly, "whenever you want to leave, Mrs. Amato." He did not close the door behind him.

"Hello, Moira."

They reappraised each other, and he offered her the chair, which she took, still staring. (Moira did not believe in divorce, neither did she believe in wives working. When the last of their nest-egg was spent she had given up the pretty little apartment and gone back to Brooklyn to live with her family, all eight of them. And she couldn't stick it much longer. Nobody in that house ever offered you a chair. Lately she had been thinking more and more about Ottavio, wondering, and now she saw for a fact that he was too good a thing to be wasted here, babbling to himself with a stick of chalk.)

"Do you know something? I'm going to get you out of this asylum," she announced. "On our own feet again."

"What did you say?" he asked.

"You're no crazier than I am. You've just got a fizzy Italian temper, you blew your top. It's over, forget it. You've got a profession right there waiting. All you'll have to do when you come out—"

"Wait a minute! I'm not coming out! I was *put* here, they don't want me out."

"All you've got to do, she repeated, "is change your name like everybody does in the business, and I'll find you a job till we get some money saved up, and then . . . a nice little shop of your own!"

"Don't you see, I *can't*? I hate it, I hate it too much, Moira. I won't do it."

"Oh, yes you will."

Oh, no he wouldn't. But he stared, moved as always: those heart-breakingly beautiful eye sockets, and the sea-green pools they cradled!

And she knew exactly what he saw, and how he felt about it. She smiled. "You'll have to agree to whatever I plan for us, you know. Before I—before they'll let you out."

Incredulously he looked straight down through those green pools, to the murky bottom. . . . So. Believing, however mistakenly, that he existed only to get out of this "asylum", he still meant to prevent

that release indefinitely, unless—Mama mia, what if she *should* spring him! Oh, not to freedom, not to any choice of his. No, “in her custody”. Meaning heads again. *For the rest of his life?* Ottavio’s mouth hardened. Better have gone to the chair for murder, than that.

“I am not going back to hair-dressing, Moira, not ever. Not under any circumstances at all.—Doctor Kuntz?” he called, and the young doctor stood casually, but immediately, in the room. “Doctor, will you take my wife out now, please? I think I’d better not see her any more.” He knew the right words now. “She isn’t sympathetic to my work. She disturbs me.”

Moira’s mouth opened, and closed, and opened.

“Of course,” agreed the doctor pacifically. He smiled apology at Moira. “Just come with me, Mrs. Amato.”

Moira didn’t even hear him, she was too furious with Ottavio. “Do you think,” she gasped, “I’m going to let you daub your life away in this free hotel, while your *wife* goes to work? . . . Art!” She flailed a contemptuous arm toward the example on the easel, sweeping a box of chalk violently off its ledge onto the floor.

Once before Ottavio had seen Moira in a tantrum. Swiftly he

moved to protect his drawings. And the doctor, recalling Ottavio’s history, moved as swiftly to come between the two of them. Both men were too late. Moira grasped the whole heavy easel, lifted it high, and crashed it to the floor . . . and Ottavio with it. The easel was solid oak. A corner caught him full on the back of his head. A shocking amount of bright blood spurted all over the doctor’s white coat, and Moira’s pale green sweater, and a picture that would never be finished.

But Ottavio knew nothing of this. He lay face down on the tan linoleum, and Doctor Kuntz knelt beside him trying to staunch the bleeding.

Then the room milled with doctors and attendants. Moira felt her elbows vised by two rigid white-sleeved arms. Two stretcher bearers slipped in and stood waiting. She followed their eyes and looked away. “Is he—dead?”

The doctor answered without looking up. “Not yet. Do you often play so rough? The guy hadn’t done a thing, I was right here. Protecting *you*,” he added bitterly.

“He *never* does anything, he *refuses* to do anything but paint. Paint paint paint. He won’t *work*! I get so mad I could kill him.”

“Yeah, so I see.”

The guards firmed their hold. "Let go of me, you're hurting me!—Why—" She stared around her, stunned, suddenly terrified, at totally hostile faces. "Why you're all crazy here! He's the murderer, a criminally insane murderer! Didn't you see his face?"

"I saw yours."

"He'd have killed me!"

"I hardly think so." Doctor Kuntz beckoned the stretcher bearers and held open the door for them to carry Ottavio out. "Concussion. Watch it, but I think he'll be okay."

Two new men in dark blue took over for the guards who were holding Moira. "Come with us now, Miss," soothed the older man.

She fought wildly, butting, as a last resort, with her head. "Why should I?" she screamed. "Mother of God, what for? Protecting myself from a looney?"

"Assault with intent to kill, we heard," the younger man filled her in.

On a morning in October, that invigorating month, Ottavio, a permanent bald spot still pinkly evident over the area of his medulla oblongata, sat sketching in the physical therapy room, vaguely humming. A few of the quieter tenants who enjoyed just standing and watching, had their mouths open to join him when he came

to the chorus, for it is a pleasant, cheerful thing, to sing together, conducive to good-will, like Christmas—when Leo and Bernie burst in.

"Tavio, you've made a sale!"

"Blue Bus, a hundred and twenty-five! To an uptown orthodontist!"

They all knew the picture: an oil of children running, on the ground and off, to catch a school bus that was really a blue balloon. When Ottavio was finally persuaded to believe this stunning news he surprised the boys by asking if they'd tell Moira for him. "I figure she's got a right to know this. Moira was always so hipped on security."

"Sure we'll tell her. If we see her." Leo hesitated. "The Doc says she may be going away today—upstate—for a while."

"Today?"

Bernie added quickly, "It isn't a half bad place, kid. I knew a girl was there. They teach you to bake bread."

Ottavio stared. Moira, *baking bread*? Suddenly a thought flashed like a meteor. "Hey! Then she'll have a profession of her own when *she* comes out, too!" His brow smoothed to astonished peace. The shine came home to his eyes. Ottavio Amato was his old young self again.

But the boys were not listening, for at the door stood Moira herself, shepherded by Doctor Kuntz.

"Excuse us," apologized the doctor unhappily. "Mrs. Amato was very anxious to see you, Ottavio."

"Moira came to say goodbye?"

"Not exactly." The doctor looked even more unhappy. "It seems your wife will not be going away after all. The case was dismissed. Just this morning."

"There wasn't any case," said Moira reproachfully. "It was a simple accident. I explained that to the judge and those lawyers and all." She confided in each separate face, sadly, and as each pair of eyes met hers, every man in the room—with the exception of Dr. Kuntz, who was watching Ottavio—believed her.

"By the way," she murmured to Ottavio, "Nadine is opening a new shop and wants me to go in with her, as her assistant. We'll be taking an apartment together, so I thought—that new furniture, and the rug. You can't use it here—"

"Sure, take the works," agreed Ottavio. "All the suites here have

wall-to-wall linoleum already. But"—he grinned at Dr. Kuntz—"it takes chalk nicely, doesn't it, Doc, when the drawing-pads run out?"

"Well okay then," interrupted Moira briskly. "Bye now, Tavio."

Silently they watched her leave, followed by Dr. Kuntz.

Then Bernie remembered. "Hey, you forgot to tell her! About *Blue Bus*! You still want us to?"

"Oh no, not now! To feel independent, that's too wonderful!" Ottavio's eyes sparkled. "I wouldn't spoil that for her! Moira's going to have a little shop of *her own*!—And I'm *not*, I don't have to, not ever!"

Chamoising his drawing-paper clean, he began eagerly and swiftly, as though he must get down, while it lasted, some gem-like vision that the world urgently needed, to charcoal in a dazzling white Fifth Avenue the morning after the Big Snow, with a solitary artist seated royally under the Arch, spang in the center of all that lovely pristine emptiness, painting a solitary artist—



COLD

CASH

By Martha
Hoke

DURING the hold-up of the Martain County Bank Alvin Pimley was nothing more than an innocent bystander. An hour later, as the inadvertent recipient of ten thousand dollars, Mr. Pimley became a thief. It was fate, he argued. Both the robber and the bank might have quarreled with his reasoning.

At four thirty-five of this same day, a Friday, Mr. Pimley removed his old-fashioned eyeshade and took his hat from the moose-head rack. He drove his ancient car along the coast road, savoring the salt air, and found a parking place close to the entrance of the bank. After carefully checking the distance between the curb and the parked car, Mr. Pimley walked into the bank and adventure with little leaping steps.

There were a dozen customers ahead of him and he found himself cushioned between two plump ladies in a line before the deposit window. While he waited, Alvin

let his mind go to the delicious decision of preparing his evening meal. Swaying between lamb chops and veal cutlets, it took him a moment or two to realize that pandemonium had suddenly broken loose within the sedate confines of the lobby.

The large lady in front of him dissolved in an untidy faint, a profusion of rayon print and patent leather. A woman screamed and a man yelled, "The bank's been held up!" An alarm shrilled and a guard dashed to the street while his partner blocked the door with his body. Somewhere outside there was a shot.

Business was not as usual. Some-

Frozen assets and frozen lettuce eventually thaw but as for their palatability no one can be certain, not even Mr. Pimley.

body said, "He got ten thousand!" And Alvin, to his surprise, suddenly found himself admiring both the bandit's daring and the size of the sum so adroitly removed. What *he* couldn't do with ten thousand dollars! He was almost disappointed when the police arrived shepherding a disheveled young man who was tentatively, if vaguely, identified by the teller.

"But he doesn't have a cent on

him!" announced the panting officer. It was then the voice of authority turned to the voice of suspicion and eyes focussed on the luckless patrons. "The man must have an accomplice," the teller suggested and, despite indignant protests, each patron was courteously and thoroughly searched, gave his or her name, and was released. The search was fruitless.

Alvin was free to go at last, and he turned his steps to his conveniently located car and his mind back to his dinner. Veal cutlets, he decided, and drove sedately to Tompkin's Frozen Food emporium on the other side of town. A locker containing a supply of good meat was Mr. Pimley's one extravagance in a frugal existence. He meditated as he drove that there was still time to thaw the cutlets if, as was his custom on the weekend, he chose to dine late.

Mr. Tompkins came out of the small office adjacent to the bank of lockers. He was a tall fat man with economy in the grouping of his features, as if they had been planned for a much smaller face.



He beamed on Alvin. "Good afternoon, Mr. Pimley. Did you hear about the bank robbery? Radio says the guy got away with ten thousand bucks."

Alvin was not averse to sharing unaccustomed limelight. He said modestly, "Mr. Tompkins, I happened to be in the bank at the time and it's true." He was gratified by the fat man's attention but his moment of vicarious glory was short-lived because, after all, he had actually seen nothing. Mr. Tompkins' interest died quickly and he turned back to the office, while Alvin, slightly deflated, shivered into the chill of the storage room, opened his locker, and selected a package of meat.

He did not discover the money until he drove into his small garage. As he backed out of the car his eyes fell on the newspaper wrapped packet half open on the floor of the rear seat. There could be no doubt about the contents.

Alvin's mouth dropped open. For a long moment he stared at the money. Then, in the space of time it took to rush and close the garage door, Mr. Pimley became a thief. Now in one hand he clutched the package of frozen veal cutlets, so stamped in purple block letters. In the other was ten thousand dollars.

Mr. Pimley's nimble mind told

him exactly what had happened. He could almost see the man fleeing the bank and tossing the money into the car in desperation. He could also see the police exploring this same possibility very soon. If, for lack of evidence, they turned the robber loose, undoubtedly it would be only a matter of time before two factions might be closing in on him.

Mr. Pimley became aware of his numbing fingers, and with this awareness came a magnificent idea which he put into practice with a sort of detached exhilaration. Quickly he opened the package of frozen meat and exchanged the deceptively small stack of bills for the cutlets, resealing the sweating paper. He slipped the package into his coat pocket and opened the garage door. To his immediate confusion he found himself face to face with his landlady.

She seemed more taken aback than he. "Oh, Mr. Pimley, I just happened to be going by and thought I'd save you bringing the rent. I thought I'd look in the window to see if your car was there," she finished lamely, her face flushed. Alvin took a grip on himself. "Of course, Mrs. Brown. Thank you very much." He took some bills from his wallet and handed them to her. "I forgot to get tea so I was just going out

again," he felt called upon to explain. Her look seemed more contrite than suspicious and he breathed a sigh of relief as she scuttled away, flapping her hand awkwardly in farewell.

Alvin wiped his brow, backed the car out of the garage, reminding himself to pick up a box of tea on his way home, and returned to Tompkin's Frozen Foods.

Luck was with him. Mr. Tompkins was not in his office. Alvin's fingers trembled a bit as he shoved the 'veal cutlets' to the back of the locker under neat stacks of frozen meat. To be on the safe side he chose a bulky package marked rump roast, swung the door shut, and went past the empty office to the street without meeting a soul.

"Why, if it isn't Mr. Pimley again!" Alvin's hand froze on the car door as Mr. Tompkin rounded the corner of the building. His heart gave a great leap but he managed to control his voice. "Why, yes, Mr. Tompkin. I just came back for a roast. Save me a trip tomorrow. I had forgotten I'm having company for dinner Sunday." He climbed into the car and drove away with a genial nod for the fat man.

Remembering to pick up the tea at the grocery where he usually traded, he returned home without further incident. All in all, he

thought, the whole thing had come off rather well. And, while he was enjoying his cutlets that night, he began to dream of a future which held promise of something better than dull existence. If hiding the money had been an impulse, he knew that now he must exhibit extreme patience.

He was neither surprised nor disturbed, although he pretended to be both, when the police arrived in short order and searched the premises and the car. While they were obviously disappointed Alvin was not. He learned that the young man suspected of the robbery had been transferred to another state to stand trial for a prior felony. At least, now he had only one faction to deal with. But he did not underestimate that faction.

Aware that he was under observation, Mr. Pimley went about his daily routine as usual. He knew the police were being very thorough. He was sure, at his landlady's suggestion, they had checked his purchase of the box of tea and he cast her a mental vote of thanks for being so snoopy. As the days went by he could see the men who watched him grow more and more bored with his fussy conventional pattern. Reluctantly he refrained from returning to the lockers. The fleshy Mr. Tompkin would not wonder at his absence,

because the office was often left unattended and patrons came and went without being remarked. But, despite his titillating dreams of the future and his confidence, Mr. Pimley was wearily relieved when it came time for his vacation.

He pursued his usual course, reserving his same room at a small boarding house on a lake in the northern part of the state. After checking this reservation it was gratifying to note the watchdogs appeared to lose interest in his activities. Only a few months from retirement, Mr. Pimley dared to hope that soon he could augment his small pension to the tune of ten thousand dollars. It was worth waiting for.

As he drove north from the city, the mugginess of a wet south wind was at his back and he was not surprised to hear over the radio that a tropical disturbance was brewing in the Gulf. It was one of the reasons he was glad he always chose this particular time of year to take his vacation. Alvin had never become used to the seasonal wild antics of wind and rain in his adopted city. "Once a Yankee always a Yankee," he allowed. "But a rather well-to-do Yankee." He brightened considerably and even whistled a little tune.

On the third morning after his arrival at his holiday spot Alvin

received a set back. When he came down to breakfast the other boarders were buzzing with the news. They greeted him in a body. "Don't you come from Martain City, Mr. Pimley?" and at his nod they looked at him solemnly. "Bad storm in Martain City last night. Real bad. Power's out and lots of trees down." The lady next to him said brightly. "I bet you're glad you're here instead of there."

Alvin sat down shaking his head sadly. He polished his silver with his napkin and listened to their reports. Suddenly, Mr. Pimley choked on his oatmeal as it came through to him. "Power's out!" The frozen food lockers! His ten thousand dollars! He stumbled to his feet. "I must get back," he mumbled and headed for the door.

Hours later he approached Martain City. Everywhere was evidence of the storm, trees uprooted and sagging telephone lines. The wind was gone but the rain sluiced down. As if hypnotized Alvin turned the old car toward Tompkins' Frozen Foods. He could see that the power had been restored but the questions tumbling through his mind were endless.

Mr. Tompkins was in his office and Alvin tried to make his voice normal and unhurried but it came

out in something of a squeak. "Dreadful storm, Mr. Tompkins. I was wondering how you made out. I hope you didn't sustain too much of a loss?" He thrust his hands into his pockets to conceal their shaking.

"As a matter of fact, Mr. Pimley, I tried to get in touch with you this morning . . . called all my customers." The fat man shook his head and consulted a list on the desk before him. "I was just lucky enough to get a load of dry ice in from Gulfport after the power went out. Otherwise all that meat would have been a dead loss."

Alvin's heart crept out of his throat prematurely. Mr. Tompkins's finger found the line he was seeking.

"Oh yes, Mr. Pimley . . . here-you are. I took the meat out of your locker myself and packed it on dry ice. None too soon either." He shrugged philosophically. "Saved most of it too. But all the veal cutlets had spoiled. I'll replace those, of course. Insurance, you know."

Alvin heard his own voice as if

from a great distance. "What . . . what happens to meat when it spoils like that?" He tried to sound merely curious.

"As a rule I sell it for soap if there is a large quantity, but we really didn't lose much." Mr. Tompkins sighed. "We burned all of it in the incinerator."

Alvin Pimley knew he was going to be violently sick. Blindly he turned to the door and groped his way toward the street. "Ten thousand dollars," he whispered. "Ten thousand dollars . . . gone!"

"Oh Mr. Pimley." Alvin turned dully to face the fat man who filled the doorway. Mr. Tompkins was smiling.

"I hope you'll find everything all right and we won't lose your business." He leaned against the door jamb. "And, by the way, I'm leaving my son in charge for a few months. Me and the missus are taking a nice long trip . . . maybe to Europe." The fat man's teeth glistened. "Came into a bit of cash recently, you see." He chuckled. "Nothing like cash, is there Pimley? Good old cold cash."



THE GREEN



WE HAD been married three months and I rather thought it was time to get rid of my wife.

I searched the greenhouse and its shed, but they contained only such non-toxic items as grafting wax, powdered limestone, Sphagnum moss, and the like.

I returned to the house. "Henrietta, where do you keep the poisons? I mean the sprays and things like that for the garden?"

"But, dear," my wife said. "We use the organic method. No sprays or chemicals of any kind. We enrich the soil nature's way with organic materials—leaves, grass clippings, and especially spoiled hay. A healthy soil produces healthy plants and insects simply do not destroy healthy plants. What did you want the poison for, dear?"

"I saw a beetle on one of the shrubs."

She smiled mildly. "One mustn't kill beetles indiscriminately, William. So many of them are beneficial."

I studied her. "Henrietta, I've been meaning to ask you, just where do you buy those dresses you wear?" I had also meant to ask, "And why?" but I did not.

She glanced briefly at a mirror. "Every month or so I just phone Elaine's shop and have her send over three or four dresses."

"Don't you ever try them on before you buy them?"

"There's no need to, dear. Elaine knows my size." She looked down at her dress. "Do you like it, William?"

"It fits perfectly. However, the

Bachelors are too smart to marry, we have been told, but William was smarter than most. He married for a vast amount of money to which he planned to fall heir. The unusual manner in which he collected however, came as a complete shock to him, as the sudden turn of events herein show.



next time you feel the inclination to buy another dress, I think that we'd both better go to Elaine's and look over her stock first."

When my father departed this world, he left me an inheritance which was just short of adequate. By that I mean that it was necessary for me to dip into my capital in order to exist in a civilized manner. During the course of fifteen years that capital, of course, diminished to non-existence. In short, at the time I met Henrietta, I lived on credit.

I have never felt that work is a duty, a pleasure, or a challenge, and I have always suspected that those who enjoy it are basically masochistic.

I had existed forty-five years without the necessity of stooping to labor, and I felt that it was manifestly unfair to expect me to do so now.

There remained one last recourse. Marriage.

I have never been against that institution for others. I realize that the average mind must occupy itself with something, whether it be

labor, comic books, or marriage. However, I have always cherished my position of independence and the prospect of becoming a member of a "team"—even if that team consisted of only two people—was acutely depressing.



Yet I was penniless, and it was necessary for me to dip into marriage.

Once having arrived at that decision, I now attended the functions of my set with an appraising eye. Desperate though I was, I found myself rejecting one prospect after another. Eventually I extended my search to afternoon teas—and at one of them I first glimpsed Henrietta.

I was not impressed. Her clothes were not exactly out of fashion, but one had the impression that she had purchased them blindfolded. She was a small, fragile-appearing woman who sat alone in a corner, smiling faintly to herself, and one had the feeling that she had wandered in accidentally and now was not quite certain of how to get out.

I had been stifling a yawn, when Henrietta spilled her cup of tea.

The hostess' eyes darted like arrows. "Really, Henrietta!"

She blushed scarlet. "I'm sorry, Clara. I was thinking of something else."

Clara's shoulders twitched. "Why can't you be more careful? I've just had the rug cleaned."

It occurred to me that a woman who dressed as Henrietta did, did so because she was either poor, or too rich to care. When the chattering resumed, I turned to Hawley

Purvis who was sitting at my right. "Henrietta? Would she be one of the Bartons? The ones who lost practically all their money last year?"

"Good heavens, no!" Purvis said. "She's a Lowell. Has that fabulous place on the Lakeview Road. Fifty acres or something like that and scores of servants."

"Married?"

"No. Never has been."

I stared across the room at Henrietta. A maid approached her with the teapot. Henrietta seemed alarmed at the prospect of again holding a full cup of tea. She was about to refuse, but she was too late. The maid poured.

Henrietta held the cup gingerly between the fingers of both hands.

I rubbed my jaw speculatively. Fifty acres? Scores of servants? I watched Henrietta covertly. She consumed half the cup of tea, and after five minutes her mind evidently wandered again. The cup slipped from her fingers and the contents spilled over the rug.

Clara's face turned livid and she shrieked. "Henrietta!"

This time Henrietta paled. If she could have fainted, I am positive she would have.

I rose and elaborately poured the contents of my own cup onto Clara's rug. "Madam," I said stiffly. "Take your damn rug to the

cleaners and charge the bill to me." It was the moment for action.

I offered my arm to Henrietta and we left.

The greatest obstacle to my marriage plans did not come from Henrietta, but from her attorney, Adam McPherson.

I made his acquaintance one week after Henrietta and I announced our engagement. He came to my apartment, introduced himself, and then stared at me stonily. "How much do you want?"

"For what?"

"How much do you want to call off your marriage to Henrietta?"

I frowned. "Did she send you?"

"No. This is my own idea. I'm offering you ten thousand."

"If you will turn, you will find a door behind you. It is the way out."

He was not intimidated. "When I heard about you, I had you investigated. You are penniless and in debt to any number of establishments, including Curley's Rug Cleaning Service." His lips tightened. "You are marrying Henrietta for her money."

"Really? And what, besides the state of my finances, makes you so positive about that?"

"I have had your acquaintances polled. They unanimously agree that you are as capable of a tender

emotion as a fish. A cold fish, they all specified." He reiterated his offer. "Ten thousand dollars."

What was a paltry ten thousand compared to Henrietta's millions? "Henrietta and I are deeply in love," I said firmly. "I would not part with her for less than . . . for all the money in the world."

"Twenty thousand."

"Never."

"Thirty. And that's absolutely final."

"So is my 'No'. Is this *your* money you are offering?"

"Yes."

"And what is your motive?"

"I do not want Henrietta to make a mistake she will regret all her life."

I ventured a guess. "Have you ever asked her to marry you?"

He nodded glumly. "About four times a year for the last twelve years."

"And her sentiments?"

"She regards me as a dear trustworthy friend. Very depressing." A thought suddenly brightened his face. "Do you *really* love Henrietta?"

I used a word strange to me. "Passionately."

He rubbed his hands. "Then of course you would have no objection to signing a document disclaiming all rights to Henrietta's money?"

"Henrietta would never consent to anything like that."

"I'll ask her."

"I'll wring your neck." I regained control of myself. "If it is your interest to see that Henrietta is happy, undoubtedly you have noticed that she has achieved a certain euphoria since I met her."

He admitted it reluctantly. Then he sighed. "All right. I will not oppose the marriage further."

"How good of you."

He studied me a moment. "Henrietta really needs to be protected."

I agreed. "She is rather simple."

He corrected me. "Ingenuous." He went to the door and then turned. "I suppose you know that she teaches at the university?"

I blinked. "Henrietta?"

"Yes. Associate Professor. Botany. Donates her entire salary to charity."

So that was why she had never been home on weekdays, except for the evenings. "She never told me."

"Probably forgot," McPherson said. "She's absentminded about some things."

Henrietta and I were married three weeks later. It was a small private ceremony marred only by the fact that McPherson arrived drunk and burst into tears as I slipped the ring on. Henrietta's

finger. She was excited and cried.

We spent our honeymoon in the Bahamas, where Henrietta collected an incredible number of ferns and various tropical vegetations for further study at home.

When we returned to her estate, I endured a week of bad service and poor food while I occupied my time by checking the household accounts.

The day Henrietta returned to teaching at the university, I called the servants together. They regarded me with uniformly narrow eyes and a collective insolence.

I attacked the keystone first—the housekeeper. "Mrs. Tragger. Front and center."

She folded her arms. "What is it?"

I smiled with infinite sweetness. "There is something about you which puzzles me. Why do you go about with that perpetual frown upon your face?"

She frowned.

I spoke gently. "I should think that you would be bubblingly happy. Gay. Absolutely hilarious. Whistling day and night. After all you have successfully managed to pad the household accounts to the sum of eighteen thousand dollars in the last six years."

Her face darkened. "Are you accusing me of . . ."

"Yes."

She glared. "I'll sue immediately."

"Please do. As soon as you are released from prison."

Uncertainty flickered in her eyes, but she said, "You can't prove a thing."

It would have been difficult. However I showed my teeth. "Madam, I *can* prove it for the satisfaction of any judge or jury. Yet I am inclined to be generous. Do you have a suitcase?"

She blinked. "Yes."

"Splendid. Then pack it at once and leave. You are fired."

She seemed about to utter something profane and devastating, but perhaps the nature of my smile changed her mind. She licked her lips and glanced at her audience. Finally she harumphed and stalked out of the room.

I turned next to the chauffeur, an unshaven creature who evidently slept in his uniform. "Simpson."

"Yeah?"

"Do you think that we ought to junk our cars?"

"Huh?"

"I really believe that in the interests of economy we ought to get rid of them—one and all. According to our records of gas consumption and mileage, I find that not one of them gives us more than one mile per gallon."

He shifted his feet. "Them fig-

ures are probably wrong somewhere."

"Possibly. But you need worry about them no longer. I presume that you too have a suitcase?"

He glowered. "Only Miss Lowell can fire me."

I smiled. "Miss Lowell is now Mrs. Graham, and if I find you on the grounds one hour from now, I shall regard you as a trespasser. I will not shoot you in the head. That is impenetrable. However, enough of you remains so that I cannot possibly miss."

I did not dismiss all of the servants—only seventy percent of them—and I had half of those replaced immediately by a reputable employment agency.

That evening dinner was on time, served flawlessly, and satisfying to the palate.

Henrietta did not notice the food—she seldom does—but toward the end of the meal she happened to glance at the serving maid and frowned thoughtfully. "Are you new here? I haven't seen you before."

"Yes, madam."

Henrietta turned to me. "What happened to Tessie?"

"I dismissed her. Also quite a few of the others. I replaced some, but only those necessary to the proper functioning of this house. Was it essential for you to have

three personal inadequate maids?" — you ever thought of teaching?"

"Three? I'm sorry, William. I didn't know I had *any*. Mrs. Tragger does all the hiring. And besides I've never seen any of them. I dress myself." She looked at me hopefully. "Did you fire Mrs. Tragger?"

"Yes."

"And the chauffeur?"

"Yes."

Her gaze was one of profound admiration. "I was always a little . . . *afraid* . . . of them. Especially the chauffeur. He always seemed so put out when I asked him to drive me anywhere. So I always took a bus."

After a month I had the immediate estate functioning with reasonable efficiency and honesty on the part of the servants.

And now, at breakfast, I pondered my next step—independence, with wealth. And that called for the quite permanent disposal of my wife.

Poison? Yes, an agreeable method, but could I purchase any without having to sign some sort of a register?

I had never killed anyone, yet I had the feeling that I could murder with a certain equanimity. Not that I would linger for the death agonies, of course. I would tactfully leave the room.

"Dear," Henrietta said. "Have

"Teaching?"

"Yes, dear. There's an instructorship in history going to be open this fall and there seems to be no prospect of filling it. So many teachers have majored in the sciences lately. They consider it more patriotic, I suppose."

Rat poison? Somehow the idea seemed too plebeian.

"All you would need is a B.A.," Henrietta said. "And you have that. And I think it would be so nice if you and I left together for the university each morning."

"I haven't the slightest inclination to teach. I much prefer to spend my time learning."

"But just learning is selfish."

"Me? *Selfish*?"

"I don't mean you specifically, dear," she said hastily. "I just meant that learning is *taking* and teaching is *giving*. And if you taught, you would feel useful."

"I dislike feeling useful. It is much too common." I suddenly remembered Ralph Winkler. Possibly he would have poison lying about his premises. He and I had been roommates in college and he had majored in chemistry, or some such trade.

After breakfast I looked up Ralph's address in the phone book and arrived there forty-five minutes later. It was a painfully neat

house set behind twenty-five feet of precise lawn.

Ralph poured coffee and settled back in his chair. "I haven't seen you at any of the alumni meetings."

"Ralph," I said. "I wonder if you might be able to lend me a little. . . ."

His eyes clouded *reminiscently*. "Remember good old Gillie Stearns?"

"No. It doesn't necessarily have to be arsen. . . ."

"He could wiggle his ears," Ralph said. "Became an anthropologist."

I glanced out of the window at what appeared to be apple trees.

"He's the one who wrote that term paper on the appendix," Ralph said.

"Who did?"

"Stearns. Nobody knows what the function of the appendix really is, but it was Stearns' theory that the way to have a healthy appendix was to wiggle. . . ."

"I see you're quite a gardener," I said.

"Orchardist. I have five apple trees, two peach, and one pecan." He frowned slightly. "The pecan doesn't seem to produce."

"Aren't you supposed to have *two* pecan trees?"

"I never thought of that."

"Ralph," I said. "Do you spray?"

I mean your fruit trees? Often?"

I had touched his subject. He rose enthusiastically. "William, follow me."

I took my cup along.

He led me through the house, into the back yard, and to the garage. He selected a key from an impressive ring and unlocked the door. "I keep the car parked on the street. Not enough room in here." He opened the door and stepped aside. "See for yourself, William."

I received the immediate impression that I had entered a combination garden shop and pharmacy. A riding mower, a tractor, and various accessory attachments occupied the floor space. The shelves lining one entire side were filled with bottles, jars, cans, and cartons. An assortment of manual spray guns hung on the walls. "How big is your place, Ralph?"

"A full quarter of an acre."

My eyes ran over the shelves and I made a random choice. "What's in that little red can in the corner?"

"Just about the strongest stuff I have," he said proudly. "It'll kill anything." He pointed to a gas mask and a rubber suit hanging on a peg. "I have to wear that when I spray. Can't leave an inch of skin exposed."

I stared at the can. "And you

spray this poison on your apples?"

"You've never seen better ones in your life, William. Not a sign of sooty blotch, calyx end rot, or Brooks fruit spot."

"And you eat these apples?"

"Perfectly safe. The spray eventually washes off through wind and weather. Besides, I always peel the ones I eat."

I finished my coffee and handed him the cup. "Would I be imposing if I asked for a re-fill? I'll wait here and browse."

While he was gone, I pried open the red can with a screwdriver. The contents were a sickly yellow dust. I filled an envelope, gingerly licked the flap to seal it, and put it back into my pocket.

Ralph returned with my cup. "Remember good old Jimmy Haskins?"

"No." I took the cup. "What do you think about the organic method of raising apples?"

A chill descended. "Most unscientific."

"We have about forty apple trees on our place," I said. "We never spray."

His lips tightened. "There are all kinds of people in this world."

I had the impression that he regretted bringing me the coffee. There was no point in departing on such a frigid note. I searched my memory and then chuckled.

"Remember good old Clarence? The one we all said could get his haircut in a pencil sharpener?"

"Yes," Ralph said coldly. "He's my brother."

I did not, of course, intend to poison Henrietta in our own home. That would lead to the inevitable autopsy and the equally inevitable electric chair.

But an earlier conversation with Henrietta had given me a splendid idea.

"Dear," she had said. "Every summer I go on a field trip for a week or two. Would it be all right if I went this year?"

I had been about to tell her that I had no objections—providing that she did not expect me to go with her—but then a thought had occurred to me. "Where will you be going?"

"It would be a canoe trip, William," she had said. "The Minnesota woods."

"You've been taking trips like this alone?"

"Oh, no. I usually go with some of my students. But this year I was hoping that . . . that just you and I could go. We could hire a guide if you think we'd need one, but actually I don't think that would be necessary if we didn't wander from our camp."

The idea of battling mosquitoes was not inviting, but I smiled. "Of course I will go with you. And we will not require a guide."

My problem had been solved. We would be alone in the middle of nowhere. I would simply kill her and bury her.

Then I would inform the authorities that my wife had wandered away from our camp and been lost. There would be a search, of course, but Henrietta would not be found.

And the actual method of the murder itself? I had dallied with shooting, stabbing, strangling, and bludgeoning. I eventually rejected them all. They required a primitive violence which is foreign to my nature. This morning I finally decided that poisoning was the civilized procedure.

When I returned from Ralph Winkler's home, I put the poison under lock and key.

In the evening, as usual, Henrietta brought her notes and reference books into the livingroom and worked on her latest paper for the Botany Journal. I put a stack of records into the phonograph and settled under a lamp for another review of Henrietta's accounts.

After a while I turned in my chair. "Henrietta, there's one item which keeps recurring. Every month you withdraw two thou-

sand dollars from one of your bank accounts. The money seems to disappear. At least I can't find any accounting for it."

Henrietta hesitated. "I'm afraid it's blackmail, dear."

"Blackmail?" Perhaps I had underestimated her. "What in the world have you done to be blackmailed for?"

"Nothing, dear. It's because of Professor Henrich. You see, he and his wife adopted a child. Only it wasn't through a regular agency. Black market, they call it. And they thought that everything was fine. But a year later a man came to them and claimed that he was the child's father. He seemed to have evidence to prove it and he wanted the baby back unless. . ."

It was obvious. "Unless Professor Henrich paid?"

"Yes. First it was one hundred dollars a month and then gradually he was paying five hundred. But the professor and his wife simply couldn't afford that for long. They had to dip into their savings and when those were gone Professor Henrich came to me to borrow money. He more or less broke down and told me the entire story. And so I took over the payments."

"You took over the payments? How could Henrich possibly *allow* you to do something like that?"

"But he doesn't really know what I'm doing, dear. I just told him that I'd talk to Smith—that's the name of the blackmailer. And later I told the professor that I'd managed to frighten Smith away by threatening to go to the police."

"But obviously you didn't."

"No. I thought it over and realized that there wasn't any actual *proof* that Smith was a blackmailer. He always insisted on cash from the professor. And so if I failed to *prove* to the police that Smith was a blackmailer, he might become very angry with my interference and actually take the child back. I was in a dilemma and money seemed to be the only way out."

"Five hundred dollars at first? And then more and more? Until today it is two thousand dollars a month?"

"Yes, dear."

I rubbed my forehead and eyes. "Don't you realize that eventually it will be three thousand? Four?"

She shook her head. "No. Two thousand is my absolute limit. I told him so when he asked for two thousand five hundred. He seemed disappointed, but he accepted the situation." She smiled. "I can be very firm when I want to."

I had difficulty speaking. "Just how much have you given this contemptible wretch?"

"I'm not positive. About fifty thousand dollars by now, I imagine."

"*Fifty-thousand dollars* of my . . . of *our* money? To a man who neither sows nor reaps?"

She nodded. "That reminds me, William. You'd have only three classes a day. That's because instructorships are usually given to students who are also working for advanced degrees and the university doesn't want to overload them. Would you like to work for your M.A. too?"

"When are you going to see Smith again?"

"He comes here the first Monday of each month. He's very prompt and he always phones me on the Sunday before to remind me to get to the bank for the cash Monday morning."

I went to the liquor cabinet and made myself a stiff drink. "When he phones next, let me talk to him."

The call came Sunday afternoon and Henrietta handed the phone to me.

"Would you please leave the room, Henrietta," I said. "I am always a bit embarrassed when I reason with people."

When she was gone I spoke into the mouthpiece. "You've received your last cent, you miserable parasite."

"Who the hell are you?"

I explained precisely and then added. "I control every penny which leaves this house and you are no longer included in our charities."

"In that case I'll take the kid away from the professor."

"I doubt very much if you can. Your references aren't exactly the best—as Professor Henrich and his wife, and I and mine will gladly testify in any court."

"Look, mister, I can still make a lot of trouble. A lot of trouble."

"You are welcome to try." But then something occurred to me. A man deprived of a two thousand dollar a month income has a tendency to turn ugly. Undoubtedly he would keep an eye on us. And when Henrietta disappeared would he put two and two together? Blackmailers are notoriously suspicious. Would he approach me and demand money for silence? And if I did not pay, would he see to it that I was caused considerable embarrassment with the police? Would he cause the authorities to resume the search for Henrietta a bit more diligently—with an eye directed toward the sub-surface of our last encampment?

There is only one way to deal with a blackmailer—be he real or potential.

"Just one moment," I said. "Do you have proof that you are the

father of the child? Real proof?"

"The professor saw the papers."

"But I haven't. I doubt if you have any proof at all. But if you do, bring it here Monday evening. No proof, no money." I hung up.

I explained to Henrietta that I wanted to see Smith alone when he came—to further reason with him—and on Monday evening she returned happily to the university to attend a lecture on the shallow root systems of the Sequoias.

When she was gone, I saw to it that the servants retired to their quarters and then went to the liquor cabinet in the study.

I opened the envelope containing Winkler's yellow powder. How much of this stuff was sufficient to kill a human being? I didn't know. I solved the problem by pouring the entire contents into a bottle of Scotch.

Smith arrived at eight-thirty. He was a somewhat bulky man with long arms and his hair line initiated approximately one inch from his eyebrows. He was expensively, if not tastefully, dressed.

I closed the door of the study behind us. "The proof, please."

He revealed marigold yellow teeth and removed a revolver from his pocket. "This is just so that you don't get any funny ideas." Then he put the gun back into his

pocket and handed me an envelope.

I examined the contents. The papers were originals, not photostats, and apparently authentic. I wandered over to the liquor cabinet, as I studied a hospital birth record. I made myself a bourbon and soda and then looked up as though I'd suddenly remembered he was still there. "A drink?"

"What you got?"

"Scotch?"

"That's it."

I poured a generous glass and handed it to him. He drained the entire contents and smacked his lips. "Good stuff."

That confirmed a suspicion of mine. People who drink Scotch have no sense of taste.

He extended the glass. "How about making that wet again?"

"Gladly." His simian aspect reminded me of good old Gillie Stearns and I asked a question. "Can you wiggle your ears?"

He seemed a bit saddened. "Used to be able to. But ever since my appendix got took out I lost the touch."

When I noticed that his coloring seemed to verge toward purple, I hastily put the papers back into the envelope and returned them. "These seem to be in order. And now if you'll excuse me, I'll get you the cash. I have it in the

library safe." His color grew worse.

I went to the library and sat down. I finished a pipe and then returned to the study.

Smith lay on the floor, quite dead, and it appeared that his departure had not been a pleasant one.

I withdrew the envelope from his pocket and then slung him over my shoulder. I carried him through the French doors to the automobile he'd parked in the circular driveway.

I drove toward the outskirts of the city, following a bus line. When the area seemed relatively unpopulated, I turned off and parked the car.

I walked back a half a dozen blocks before I boarded a bus.

Perhaps Smith's picture would appear in the newspapers when his body was found. If it did, and Henrietta noticed it, I would explain that a man like Smith undoubtedly had many enemies and that one of them had killed him. I felt confident that she would accept that explanation.

At Fremont Street, I left the bus and walked the two blocks to Ralph Winkler's home.

He opened the door and regarded me with distinct inhospitality. "Yes?"

"Ralph," I said. "We've been having a little trouble with field

mice in our apple orchard."

His economic smile indicated vindication. "So organic gardeners have field mice problems?"

"I'm afraid so. I wonder whether you might have something potent . . . some chemical . . . which might enable us to get rid of them?"

I was welcome instantly. He stepped aside and we journeyed through the house and to his garage.

He surveyed his pharmacy. "What'll you have? I've got compounds here that will throw mice into convulsions."

I recalled the messy decline of Smith. "Basically I'm a humanitarian. Do you have something gentle, yet still lethal?"

He was disappointed in me. "Very well. I suppose I have something like that here . . . somewhere. But you really should try Cyclolodidan. I use it all the time."

"Do you have field mice?"

He nodded glumly. "Can't seem to get rid of them."

When Henrietta returned at eleven that night, I told her that Smith would never bother her or Professor Henrich again. "Threatened him with the police and twenty years in prison. He left here shaken, trembling, and penitent."

Henrietta gazed at me admiringly. "You seem to be able to get things done, William. I feel so safe with you."

During the week, Henrietta usually lunches at the university, but at twelve-thirty the next day she came home breathless and smiling like a child. She waved an envelope. "It's been accepted."

"What has?"

"*Alsophilia grahamicus*."

"*Alsophilia grahamicus*?"

"A tropical tree fern, William. I discovered it during our honeymoon and when I couldn't classify it, I realized that it might be a true species. So I named it after you—that's the *grahamicus* part—and sent it to the Society for verification."

I rolled the words on my tongue. "*Alsophilia grahamicus*." Rather pleasing. Perhaps I might yet become a footnote in some textbook—my bid toward immortality.

"Are you pleased, William?"

"That was very thoughtful of you."

"I'm having the tip of one frond put into a plastic token so that you can wear it always."

That evening Adam McPherson appeared for dinner. It had been his habit to do so the first Tuesday of every month for the past ten years and after our marriage

Henrietta had still chosen to honor the standing invitation.

I met him at the door. "McPherson, I want a word with you."

He regarded me for a moment. "Really? What a coincidence. It was my intention to speak to you too." He glanced about. "Where is Henrietta?"

"Upstairs grading some term papers."

I led him into the study and came directly to the point. "McPherson, you are Henrietta's lawyer and comptroller. Surely you must have been aware that prior to my appearance this household was run in a most strange manner—padded payrolls, superfluous servants, astronomical household expenses."

He nodded. "Of course."

My eyes narrowed. "And yet you did nothing about it?"

"Why should I? After all, I am the one who was responsible for the entire glorious arrangement."

"You baldly admit that?"

"Certainly." McPherson went to the liquor cabinet and surveyed the contents. "It was quite a profitable arrangement for me. Kickbacks, you know." He looked back at me. "Henrietta is an excellent botanist, but she has no accounting ability whatsoever. And she trusted me."

I felt the impulse to strangle. "I

do not care how messy this is going to be, I intend to prosecute."

He was not perturbed. "If you do, I shall see that you join me in prison—or possibly worse. For murder."

I was, of course, temporarily quieted.

He brought forth a bottle and a glass. "Several years ago I noticed that Henrietta regularly withdrew five hundred dollars from one of her bank accounts. It was a relatively insignificant sum, but she seldom uses cash, and I became curious. I asked her about it and when she proved uncharacteristically evasive, I questioned the servants—who were under my command, so to speak—and eventually ascertained the existence of Mr. Smith. Further investigation on my part—if one may use that term for eavesdropping, established the reason for his monthly visits."

McPherson poured liquor into his glass. "Smith had a limited imagination. He was apparently satisfied with five hundred dollars. But I was not." He smiled. "Therefore I approached him with the proposal of prison or cooperation. Naturally he chose cooperation. Of the two thousand he eventually received monthly from Henrietta, one went to me."

I stared at the bottle he still held in his hand. It was the

Scotch which had eliminated Smith. I had forgotten to dispose of it.

McPherson put the bottle back on the shelf. "When Smith informed me that *you* wanted to see him personally, I wondered what you were up to now—after all you had already ruined one of my sources of income. And so I drove here last night, parked on the street, and waited for him to come out of your house. It was my intention to question him immediately about his meeting with you." He smiled. "His car came out of the driveway, but *you* were driving." He looked at his glass and then at me. "Can I make you a drink?"

"No, thank you," I said. "But by all means, please help yourself."

He savored and then finished the contents of his glass. He coughed appreciatively and reached for the bottle again. "I followed you. And when you walked away from Smith's car, I looked inside. Smith lay on the floor, obviously dead. I did not pry into the manner of his death and left immediately. How did you kill him?"

"I stabbed him in the back," I said.

He smiled. "Please do not attempt the same with me. I am wary and will remain at arm's

length." He tried to stay alert.

And now *I* smiled. "I cannot expose you without being exposed myself? And so it is your intention to resume bilking Henrietta's estate? With my passive cooperation?"

He nodded. "Exactly."

I noticed that his complexion was changing to a more colorful hue. "We will discuss this further after dinner," I said pleasantly. "And now I shall see if Henrietta is ready."

I retired to the library, smoked a pipe, and returned to the study.

McPherson was dead.

I removed his car keys from his pocket and carried his body to his car outside. I deposited him in the trunk compartment and parked the car on the street.

I returned to the house just as Henrietta came down the stairs. "Is Adam here yet?"

"No, my dear."

She smiled. "He's rather fond of me. It was very thoughtful of him to cry at our wedding."

We delayed dinner half an hour and then sat down without him.

At ten that evening when I went out for a walk, I disposed of McPherson's car in the same manner I had used for Smith and returned by bus.

Henrietta was considerably shocked when she read of Mc-

Pherson's death and the police were puzzled. Henrietta recovered, but the police remained puzzled and the days passed.

At the end of the semester, Henrietta and I packed and drove north to the Minnesota lake country. We rented a canoe, purchased supplies, and bravely proceeded into the wilderness on a warm Saturday afternoon.

Since we proceeded down stream, the paddling was not particularly tedious and the first hour passed pleasantly.

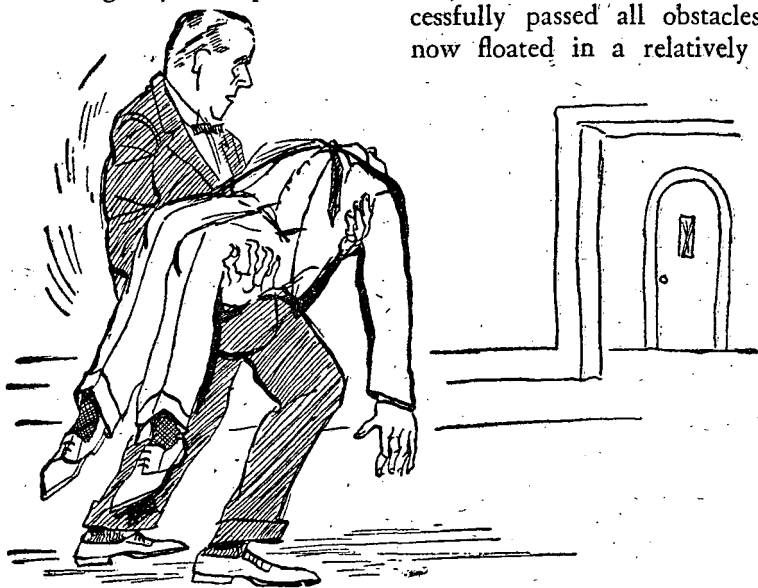
However as we approached the first white water, I realized, a bit too late, that the occupation of running rapids is a bit specialized.

I would gladly have paddled to

shore and portaged, but I found that we were in the grip of the current. We had no choice but to hold on and attempt to steer.

We safely rode two-thirds of the rapids and I had reached a faint optimism, when suddenly a jagged rock appeared directly ahead. I endeavored frantically to avoid it. However, the after end of the canoe smashed into the obstruction and we turned over.

I found myself tumbling in the rushing water, grasping wildly for some handhold, but my fingers merely slipped off the wet rocks. Suddenly I found myself falling. I plunged deep into the water. When I fought my way to the surface, I discovered that I had successfully passed all obstacles and now floated in a relatively quiet



pool at their base. Then I relaxed.

I swam to shore, climbed the bank, and looked back upstream.

Henrietta clung to an outcropping of rock just before the drop into the pool. She was pale and her eyes looked toward me for help.

I shouted. "Henrietta, let go of that rock. You'll be carried into the pool below. It's perfectly safe."

She looked down and then at me. "But I can't swim."

I blinked. *She couldn't swim?*

I felt my heart beating. This was the opportunity! There would be no need for poison. There had been a canoe accident and she had drowned. It was as simple as that. And I would walk back to the nearest habitation and tell the story.

I raised my voice again. "Hold your breath and let go of that rock. I'll be waiting down below and I'll bring you to shore."

I took off my soaking shoes, my trousers, and my shirt. Then I smiled at her and waved my hand. "All right. Let go."

She did not hesitate.

The current caught her and she plunged over and down into the pool.

I turned my back toward the water. All I would have to do now was wait. How long? Five minutes? Ten?

I looked down at my clothes. The round plastic token containing the tip of frond had fallen out of my pocket and lay on the grass. *Alsophilia grahamicus*.

I found myself trembling.

I had killed Smith and McPherson and they had deserved to die. But does one kill a child?

A child? Yes, a child-woman and she loved me. And in my own way I had grown rather . . .

I cursed savagely and plunged into the water.

I found Henrietta immediately and brought her to the surface. She was still obeying my injunction to hold her breath, though rather desperately.

I grasped her and began backstroking towards the shore. "You may breathe now, Henrietta. But only through your mouth. Not your nose. Taste the air and if it has water in it, spit it out and try again."

When we reached shore we sat in the sun. But it was still a bit cool and so I held her.

She looked up at me. "I'll always be able to depend on you, won't I, William? All the rest of my life?"

I almost sighed. "I'm afraid so."

And in September I would probably be teaching at the university.

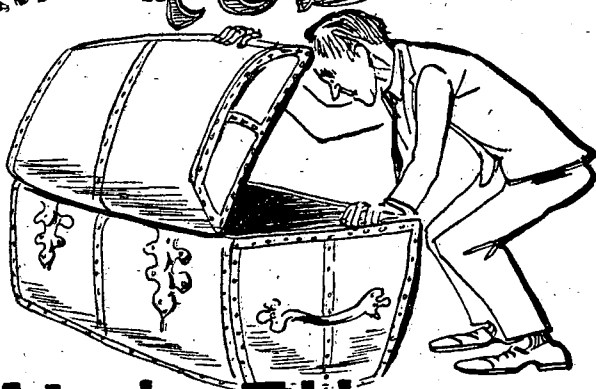
Suddenly I looked forward to it.

CURTAINS, dusty and fragile with age, darkened the sombre rooms of the house. The climate was glacial. Only the kitchen contained any warmth at all. Lena sat in that retreat. Age had watered her eyes and dimmed their lustre, her jowls sagged, all the flesh on her frame conceded to the same terrible affliction: Picked clean of the last shred of meat, a few chicken bones lay on her plate. A glass of whiskey stood beside them. Tomorrow the soup pot would claim the bones, the whiskey was to warm her now.

She eyed it, lifted the glass, emptied it quickly and came alert to the footsteps on the stairs. Ray,

her dead sister's husband, was coming down. Quickly she put the whiskey glass in the closet and sat again as the door opened. Behind her footsteps sounded in the foyer.

He doesn't knock any more, she thought, resenting this familiarity. He entered the kitchen, greeted her. She looked up and nodded, glad for his company now that he was here. He took a chair at the opposite end of the table and sent her a searching look. She'd been drinking again, and there was no whiskey for him. He nodded to the bones on the plate, noting how she'd stripped them clean, and remarked that she was eating a late



BY Hal ELSON

It has been said that "He who covets what belongs to another deservedly loses his own", and a more pointed example of how to avoid such a catastrophe is brought home here.



lunch, intimating a slight rebuke.

"I didn't think you were coming," she said.

"Ah, I wouldn't disappoint you but I got to thinking upstairs that I've been making a pest of myself."

"But I enjoy your company," said Lena. "Oh, the way this house once was, all the visitors, parties, wonderful times. It's not been the same since Philip died."

"True," Roy admitted, thinking of her husband. It was ten years since he'd passed on, and Lena had aged frightfully, but worse were her ways, particularly with money. A wonder she can spare the beer, he told himself, and caught her gaze.

"A penny for your thoughts?" she said.

He shrugged the question off, complained of the chill in the house and wondered how she stood it. The stove had gone out because the coal was worthless, she said, like everything new. When he tried to explain that all coal was old, she ignored him and vehemently attacked the present. It was an age of cheapness and shoddiness.

He smiled. She didn't understand. Once more he tried to explain the genesis and nature of coal. The attempt was futile. She cut him off, and he surrendered to her ignorance and senility. "All right. I won't dispute the point," he said. "But are you going to sit here and freeze?"

She glanced at the stove and decided it was too much bother to start a fire. They could sit in the dining room. "Another icebox," he countered.

She agreed to light the oil stove, and led him to the dining room. Once there, Ray gazed at the room, which was a veritable museum crowded with antiques, many of them valuable. More were in the parlour, and packed away in the cellar. Collecting dust, he thought, nodding.

Lena caught this and asked him what was wrong. "Nothing," he lied. "I was just looking at your antiques."

"There's so many. I can't take care of them all. I haven't the strength any more. Ah, it's a shame to neglect such beautiful things,

so sad. But what else can I do?"

"Couldn't you sell them? You'd make it a lot easier for yourself," he suggested, and she looked at him aghast. Everything that belonged here would remain. As for the money, she wasn't in need of it.

Which was true. He glanced at the huge diamonds sparkling on her fingers. She saw the look in his eye and qualified her statement. She wasn't in need, but neither was she rich. It was an old defense.

The old hag. Who does she think she's fooling? And, damn it, where's the beer? To wait like this irritated him, but she wasn't to be hurried. She'd had her whiskey already and her blood ran warm, even if her mind was no longer alert. Whiskey and senility made a bad mixture. He saw her watching him again.

She invited him to a glass of beer, laughed when he quickly accepted and arose from her chair, a bit unsteady on her thin wasted legs. He didn't miss that. Probably she'd been hitting the bottle all morning. He watched her to the kitchen, then got to his feet and crossed the room to a shadowed corner. A group of figurines stood on a rack. There was no time for selection. He picked the nearest and dropped it in his pocket.

Footsteps warned him, the chair

he'd been sitting in was too distant. He moved to the sideboard where crystal sparkled, two tall decanters of beautiful design, one amber, the other a dark rich red.

Lena entered the room with a bottle and two glasses. She set the glasses on the table, filled them and looked at Roy. "I've been admiring your decanters," he said.

She sat and nodded. "They're beautiful. You don't see anything like them any more, do you?"

"Hardly." He returned to his chair, and she reached for her glass. "Philip gave them to me when we were first married," she sighed. "In the old days they were always filled with the best sherry, the finest port."

"No one to speak of drinks sherry or port any more," said Roy, lifting his glass of beer and saluting Lena. She toasted to the old days, and they drank. Later, she raised her dress, took a key from a petticoat pocket and asked if he wanted another bottle. He didn't mind in the least, and she gave him the key which was for the cellar door. "You'll find the beer in the back. I don't trust myself on the stairs of late," she said.

He promised to be up in a jiffy and headed for the cellar door, still amazed that she'd given him the key. It was proof she was doddering. He smiled to himself, paused

at the bottom of the cellar stairs, took the figurine from his pocket and examined it. Next, he examined the cellar. Two bins, both locked, contained heaven knew what. A half dozen trunks lined a wall, old furniture, oil-lamps, dishware, glasses, statues, items of every description filled every available inch of space.

In the rear, a door stood ajar. He entered a bin and row after row of dusty bottles met his eye. He took two and went back upstairs. "I thought you lost yourself," Lena said as he entered the dining room.

"I almost did. How do you find your way down there with all that junk?"

"It may be dusty, but it's hardly junk. All my best things are there."

"If they are, they must be rotting away."

"No more than I am," Lena said with a laugh. "But that's enough about them. Pour me a glass."

He obliged. They soon finished the bottle, opened the second and topped it off. By this time the room had grown warm, and Roy had had his fill. He got to his feet, said he was leaving. Lena merely nodded, but when he turned to the door, she asked for her key. Senile or not, he knew one thing, she wasn't giving him free access to the cellar.

Still, he'd fooled her, for the figurine was still in his pocket. Off he went to an antique dealer named O'Mara. Once in the shop, he set the figurine on a counter and asked for an offer. O'Mara examined it and offered ten dollars.

"Are you crazy, man? It's worth a good deal more," said Roy, but he was talking. He had no idea of the figurine's worth. O'Mara admitted it was a beautiful piece, and raised his offer to fifteen. Roy demanded twenty, but conceded when O'Mara dropped three crisp fives on the counter.

Out he went with the money clasped tight in his fist. It wasn't much, but he was out of work at the moment. In fact, it was something he avoided whenever possible, so the money was a windfall and there was more to come with so many antiques in Lena's house.

Two days later he called on her again. She was eating in the kitchen and offered him nothing. When she finished, they went into the dining room. He wasn't his usual self, his cockiness had deserted him and he waited nervously for her to mention the figurine. When she failed to, he realized she didn't know what she owned and he felt lifted. She gave him the key to bring up some beer from the cellar.

Several hours later he left, with another figurine tucked in a pocket. Straight as an arrow he went to O'Mara's shop and this time was disappointed. O'Mara offered him five for the figurine, raised it to ten and ended the dickering. "It's not worth a cent more," he explained. "I'm going overboard."

"Sure, you are," said Roy, but he accepted the money and stalked toward the door.

The next day he dropped in on Lena, without any qualms. As usual, she was in the kitchen and looking morose. This didn't disturb him. "The fire out?" he said as she looked up with grey watery eyes. "Good heavens, don't be afraid to spend a little on the heat. No wonder you look so miserable."

"The heat's the least of my worries," she answered, drawing her shawl tighter.

"Worries? You've had everything and got everything. What more could you want?"

She stared at him as if she hadn't heard, arose from the table, entered the dining room and sat in her ancient rocker.

"You're not putting the heater on?" he asked.

"Light it for me. I don't feel well."

He obliged and looked up with a

grin on his liquor-flushed face. Lena's was ashen. "What is it?" he said. "Go on, say it. Sure, I've been drinking."

"That's your business, and it does no harm. But that's not what's on my mind. Two of my figurines are gone," she said, pointing across the room.

With the drinks in him he wasn't upset. "Someone took them? Come on, Lena. That's not so. You probably misplaced them. With all the stuff you have in this house, it's a wonder you know where anything is."

"But I do know. Nothing's been moved in years and I know exactly where everything is."

Roy nodded, face serious, a bit nervous, but still brazen. "Well, I'm your best visitor. Maybe I took them."

She shook her head. "Not you, Roy. I hope you don't think I'd put it on you?"

"Of course not," he said, grinning again. "But I've a good idea what happened."

Unable to follow, Lena frowned and asked him to explain. He suggested a beer first. She was in no mood, but it was part of the ritual. She handed him the key to the cellar and down he went for a bottle. Returning, he poured two glasses and said, "I better not bring it up. You wouldn't want to hear

it from me so I'll be quiet."

His play only roused her curiosity. "If you have something to say, say it," she told him.

He sighed deliberately. "All right. Perhaps it's for the best. You're getting on. You were eighty last month, and your mind isn't so sharp. You forget little things. Then the important things."

Her nostrils flared. "If you're thinking I'm beginning to dodder, you've another think coming," she snapped.

He smiled and told her not to be angry, that, if one lived long enough, this happened. Not to her, she answered, but a strange look came into her eyes. She was frightened.

He noticed and said, "You don't want to admit it but you did forget where you put those figurines." He patted her shoulder. "No need to worry. They're somewhere in the house, aren't they?"

With both fear and confusion in her eyes, she stared at him and finally nodded. "I suppose I did misplace them," she said in a voice barely above a whisper.

"There, you see. It's nothing to be bothered about. You'll run into them in a closet or trunk."

"And suppose I don't?" Her helplessness made him smile. Everything was working as he'd wanted it. "Don't worry. Better

have some more beer," he urged her. "It'll do you good."

When she agreed, he went down to the cellar, examined it, and discovered a trunk with an enormous lock. His heart pounded. This was where she kept the real stuff, he decided, and tried the lock. Its strength added to his conviction. Smiling, he brought up four bottles of beer, entered the dining room and found Lena with her head bowed. "Ah, now, this'll straighten you," he said, opening the first bottle.

It took an hour to do away with the four quart bottles. By that time, what with the liquor he'd had before dropping in, Roy was drunk but alert enough to know what he was doing. As for Lena, she was in no condition to leave her rocker; her eyes were closing.

"Better sleep," he suggested, and she nodded. Her chin fell to her chest, her breath came in heavy rasps.

"I'm going now, Lena."

No answer. He grinned and stood up, with the key to the cellar in his pocket, but he needed one for the trunk. A ring of keys hung in the kitchen. He took them and left, but didn't go directly to the cellar. Too wise for that, he went upstairs, waited and came down.

There was no trouble getting into the cellar. The trunk was an-

other matter. None of the keys would fit the lock. Again and again he tried them, then went to the bin where the beer was kept. Greedily he emptied a bottle, flung the useless keys aside and struck a huge jug. The sound made him flinch. He waited, listening for footsteps. The house remained silent. He began to search the cellar and finally found a hammer.

Swaying, he returned to the trunk and took the lock in his palm, for it was an old trick that he knew, to strike a lock sharply and spring it without damaging it so that it could be snapped shut again, with no one the wiser. A blow of the hammer accomplished nothing. Again he struck; the lock stayed closed. He listened now, heard nothing. His whole body was quaking. He raised the hammer, struck again and the lock sprang open.

Quickly he removed it, lifted the top and his jaw dropped. The trunk was empty. He swore, and a sound made him turn. There stood Lena, eyes grey and watery, face ashen, flesh sagging. Swaying, he stared at her, then said, "What do you want, you old witch?"

Softly she asked for her keys. "When you let me have the money you've hidden and the diamonds Philip left you," he said. Quietly she repeated herself, then sudden-

ly she pushed him and over he toppled into the trunk, with his legs sticking out. As he tried to rise, she lifted the bottle he'd emptied and smashed him over the head. He groaned and fell back, with his legs still out of the trunk. She tucked them in, closed the lid, snapped the lock and listened.

Not a sound from the trunk, the whole house seemed terribly empty and silent. She blinked her grey watery eyes and appeared in a daze, but finally she moved. Her eyes brightened, jowls trembled as she bent to the trunk. Her voice was only a whisper, but there was anger in it. "You dirty ungrateful whelp. You thief," she said. "You can come out when you tell what you did with my two figurines."

When he didn't reply, she mumbled, "You'll stay there till you find your tongue," and went to the bin where she kept her beer. With a bottle clutched in her hands, she went upstairs, poured for herself and sat down in her rocker.

Grey light penetrated the dusty curtains, the pale gold liquid in the glass seemed tarnished. She watched the bubbles rising, finally picked up the glass and set it down. Again the house seemed terribly empty and silent. Ah, it's not good to be drinking alone. Where's Roy? she wondered. He ought to be here by now.

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It's ONE of those Sunday supplement feature articles. Very sensational. It came out in the magazine section of the Evening News, and I've read it at least ten times already. It's called *A Nightmare of Persecution*, and this is how the article begins:

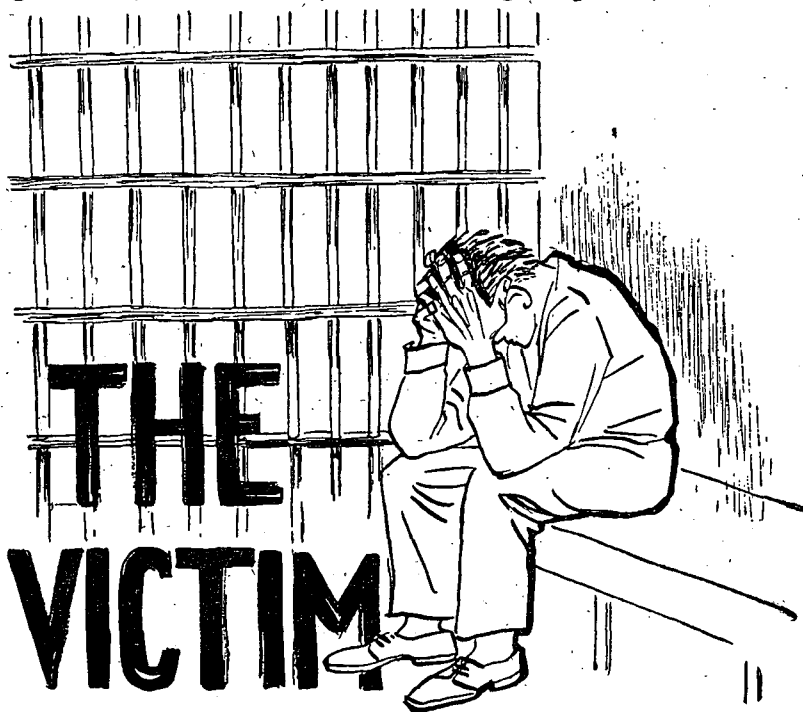
"On the night of May 1, Ellis Thompson, 42-year-old aircraft worker was dragged from his apartment and accused of the most despicable of human crimes. Here, in his own words, is his nightmare. A terror-wracked experience that might at anytime become yours.

"For Ellis Thompson is innocent!"

There follows a few thousand of Ellis Thompson's supposed own words, only they're really the feature writer's words. Very entertaining and exciting words, but Ellis Thompson only supplied the facts. I should know.

I'm Ellis Thompson.

The Evening News paid me \$3000 for exclusive rights to my confession. I'm lying here looking at this big fat check, and considering the spot I'm in, it's all ironically amusing, I guess you could say.



Anyway, right now I'm laughing. In fact, I'm laughing my fool head off.

Meanwhile, in case you missed it, here's my story as it appeared in the Evening News:

... My name is Ellis Thompson. No one important. Just an aircraft worker, passed forty and turning gray on top. Or I *was* an aircraft worker until I returned to my apartment that Monday night. Being unimportant I made a common mistake. I figured nothing important could happen to me. It was a fatal mistake, and only the first of a series. Because all at once I was heading down for the electric chair and everything I said and did seemed to grease the skids under me. But of course I know that ignorance of the law is no excuse. And it so happened that the law was standing just outside my door.

I'd killed another evening in a local bar and I got back to my apartment around 10:00 that night. I decided to look at a little television, knock off another can of beer before turning in. So far it was about par for another dull



day. Then I heard a knock on the door.

Hearing a knock on my door I did what later turned out to be a brave thing. I went right over to the door and opened it. Why not? It was a respectable neighborhood. I didn't owe anybody enough to worry about how far he might go to collect it. I had made a few enemies but I doubted if they would remember my name. I'd been raised on a Missouri farm where it was sort of traditional to be friendly with visitors, even strangers.

So I opened the door. I was even smiling a little. There were two of them in dark suits and

Miracles abound for those who believe in them. We have some one here who not only believes but presses his luck above and beyond the legal endurance of his lawyer, and continues to press on into greener fields of substance.

with heavy faces. Either one of them was bigger than me. They both shoved me back into the room. The older one shut the door. The younger one kept shoving me until my back was against the wall. Two characters had gotten the wrong apartment, I thought. They were mistaking me for someone else.

I had stopped smiling.

I was twisted around, my face pushed into the wallpaper. I was frisked, my wallet searched. It wasn't returned to me. One of them started throwing clothes out of my closet. I finally got around to asking what was going on.

"We'll ask the questions, buddy," the younger one said.

"All right," I said. "So who's asking?"

The younger one gave me a little warning tap on the ribs that made me cough. "I'm Detective Martin. This is Detective Santino."

"You've made a mistake," I said. "I'm Ellis Thompson."

Detective Santino had my gray raincoat and hat and he was examining them with great interest. "We know who you are, Thompson. You made the mistake." They were doing all the smiling now, both of them.

Human rights? It hurts only when I laugh. They didn't even show me a warrant, let alone a

badge. All they showed me was who was right. The authority with the gun is always right, whenever it wants to be. That's how it is. Just open the door and you can lose your liberty. But then I remembered reading it, or maybe seeing it on *The Defenders*.

"So, where's your search warrant?" I asked.

They weren't smiling anymore. They laughed. "Didn't you invite us in, Thompson?" Santino said. "And won't you need the coat and hat? It might rain."

"What if it does?"

"If it does you should be prepared, so put on the raincoat and hat. We're going out."

They dressed me up to go out and started hustling me toward the door. I held back. Something was beginning to crawl inside of me. It was fear. "What's the idea? I'm supposed to have done something?"

"Look here, Thompson. You got objections to co-operating with the police? Where's your civic spirit? You don't object to answering a few questions do you?"

Santino turned off the lights, shut the door. I never saw that apartment again. They escorted me down the hall, out to a patrol car. The landlady was watching me from the first floor window, curtains slightly parted.

"What do you want to ask me about?" I asked.

"Wait until we get to City Hall," Santino said. "This is hardly the proper place for a serious discussion, is it?"

I felt the same way you would feel under the circumstances. Scared, confused. Sort of numb. They're cops. You haven't done anything wrong but maybe run a red light last week. But you begin to feel guilty anyway. Already I started to feel like they must have a good reason or why pick me up. But it was just some little mistake, I kept telling myself. I was both right and wrong. It was a mistake but it wasn't little.

Now I'm not blaming Martin and Santino so much. They already figured I was guilty, and that was the fault of the District Attorney's office. I blame the negligence and ambitious State apparatus that persecuted me. I blame everyone who had anything to do with what's been done to me, especially the Police Commissioner and the Office of the D.A.

I don't even blame Miss Dorothy Travis much. Maybe they paid her off to testify against me. Few of us can resist the big payoff. Or maybe she was just crazy.

I was led, dazed and bewildered,

to Chief Hoffmann's office at City Hall. Also present were Police Commissioner Borge, D.A. McDonald, and assorted detectives and a police stenographer. The raincoat and hat stayed on. I started to sweat. The air was close, stale with cigarette smoke and stale wet cigar stubs.

Where was I at one-thirty Sunday morning last? Where was I Saturday night? Where did the mud stains on my raincoat and hat come from?

I told them the only thing I could think of. And why should I have bothered to think of anything else? I told them the truth. I'd been driving around Saturday night. Later I dropped in to the Shamrock Bar on King's Road for a few beers.

Then you admit you were in the Shamrock Bar Saturday night.

Why not. It's no worse than any other roadside joint, is it? And that mud could have come from anywhere. Mud's mud isn't it, even in your eye? Then I remembered having a flat tire Saturday night and changing it. So that's where I'd picked up the mud. But I couldn't remember just when or where I'd changed that flat. Sometime after midnight, or maybe before I got to the Shamrock Bar. I'd been drinking a little so my memory was on the hazy side. I

guessed, though, that it was somewhere along King's Road.

Where did I go after leaving the Shamrock Bar?

Well, I drove around some more. Then I went back home to the Marathon Arms and to bed.

What time?

I didn't remember. Probably around 2 a.m. I didn't remember and it didn't matter. Because, although I hadn't been told about it yet; they had already decided I was guilty. They hadn't told me or reminded me that I had a right to defense counsel either. Nor that I didn't have to answer self-incriminating questions. But why bother with all that stuff when you're already guilty, tried and heading for the chair?

They brought in the chubby blonde with dye-streaked hair and too much makeup, including green eyelids. When Chief Hoffmann pointed at me and asked the blonde if I was the man, the blonde looked as if she had seen a snake. "That's him all right! That's him!"

She was positive?

"I sure am positive, honey. You ever forget how a skunk smells?"

"Thank you, Miss Travis. That will be all for now."

They brought in the shriveled little guy with wrinkles around his eyes, a little red mustache. I remembered him. The bartender from

the Shamrock remembered me.

"Yeah, that's the man. Came into the Shamrock several times last week. Same face, same coat and hat. Couldn't mistake him."

When did he come in?

"'Bout nine-thirty."

And when had I left?

"Little after midnight, I'd say."

And what time had the girl, Dorothy Logan, left the Shamrock?

"About the same time."

Mr. Dunlap was then thanked and told that he could also go about his business. And I tried to explain about my wife, how she had divorced me a year ago and how I wasn't over the hangover. How I got lonely. Didn't know what to do with myself. Just drove around. Dropped into bars. Sure, I'd been in the Shamrock, but I didn't exactly know how long. I'd wanted to kill time, not count it. Maybe it was from 9:30 to around midnight.

But I hadn't followed any girl out. The kind of girls that hung out at the Shamrock, you were wary about what followed you out.

Sure you did, Thompson. We know everything.

I wiped my face. I thought about what a comfort it might be to have a lawyer to tell me what was supposed to be going on. But then I

decided to let it ride. I'd be friendly. I'd cooperate. If I yelled for a lawyer, wouldn't they figure I was guilty of something, being uppity? They might. I hadn't done anything wrong, so I would just tell them the truth. That's right. I actually thought that way.

And the truth was the worst thing I could have told them.

"What girl?" I asked. "What're you talking about anyway?"

"Seventeen year old kid. Dark brown hair. Red sweater. Helen Logan. Maybe you missed the name, Thompson. Didn't know her very long did you?"

"I didn't know her at all. I never saw any girl—"

But I heard the words. They were words about me. I listened, and my mouth turned dry and my stomach seemed to turn completely over.

... followed her when she left the tavern, got into your car. Drove her into Jonathon's Grove back of the tavern, isn't that right, Thompson?

"No," I said. "What are you talking about?"

It was hot, so hot in there, stifling. I couldn't get enough air into my lungs.

... confess, Thompson, get it over with. Tell the truth. It'll be easier for everyone, including you. We know it all anyway. Tell us

how it was, boy. Let's hear it.

"What are you talking about?" I kept saying.

... we can prove it anyway, Thompson. Miss Travis saw it all.

I kept hearing the words. They came out of the dark at me. They didn't make any sense, but they kept coming. Words telling about what someone had done. Horrible things. Assault. Beating someone's head with a rock.

I kept asking what they were talking about, then I suddenly stopped asking. It had finally gotten through.

They were talking about me.

I've had nightmares like that, but this was worse. But I went through it like that just the same, like a sleepwalker. I couldn't afford a lawyer, and anyway I had decided no one could help me. I felt beaten, helpless. I'd never gotten a decent break in my life. Maybe a hundred and eighty million people handy, and they had to grab me. Fate had a special private little bit worked out for me, I decided. And there was no use fighting it. After a lifetime of lousy breaks I was being methodically kicked to death while I was down.

I didn't bother trying to get up. Not then. I guess I still couldn't really believe what was happening

to me. Dreams are like that. I mean the kind of dreams cooked up by high-handed dreamers like the D.A. and the Police Commissioner.

They let me sleep and dream on for hours. They woke me to arraign me formally in Homicide Court. They took me in handcuffs from the City Hall on a gray drizzling morning.

A skinny stoop-shouldered guy with horn-rimmed glasses, not more than twenty-five, met me at Homicide Court. Apologetically he admitted that the court had assigned him to me as my Public Defender. His name was Hal Mercer. What I really needed was something to defend me from Hal Mercer. Having him as my lawyer was the same as entering a guilty plea of first degree murder the first jump out of the box. I'm positive that the D.A. keeps public defenders like Hal Mercer around to defend those he has definitely staked out for the chair.

I've since learned that the majority of people charged with crime are poor. Poor people can't afford competent defense lawyers. Competent defense lawyers aren't often tickled at the idea of working for nothing. So the court assigns lawyers who work with very little compensation, and naturally it doesn't usually attract big names in

the field. Many young lawyers are glad to accept such cases to get a little experience.

So they get the experience. And poor defendants get life. Or the chair, often for crimes they never committed at all. But let us not deny young men like Hal Mercer valuable experience.

He conferred with me for fifteen minutes at Homicide Court. I told him my story. Told him what I'd told the law, what the law had told me. I admitted that I had no witnesses to verify what I said. But that the law had witnesses to verify what they said. I couldn't prove I was driving around at the time I was supposed to be murdering Helen Logan. I couldn't remember stopping for gas and thereby maybe having a witness. I hadn't needed any gas. No one had helped me change a tire. I was alone. I had admitted being at the Shamrock bar all evening. Admitted getting home around 2 a.m. It seemed that the murder had come off, according to Miss Travis, at one o'clock.

I didn't have any friends either, not in that town. I had no influential contacts. I didn't have any important political connections. I didn't have any money.

I didn't have a lawyer either. I only had Hal Mercer.

I didn't have a chance.

Mercer quickly zippered up his briefcase and made a hurried exit. He didn't look back. Two days later I was indicted for first-degree murder by the Grand Jury.

The Grand Jury heard only four witnesses. All for the prosecution. I had come to town recently to work at the aircraft plant. I didn't have a single character witness. Mercer claimed that he had tried to find one but no one seemed to know me well enough to swear that my heart was pure. I guess that never helps much. People with nice reputations have pulled off some very raw stunts. My landlady had nothing to say about me except that she figured me for a suspicious character all along. Living alone, divorced, drinking beer all evening, loafing around bars, coming in late. Anyway, she said, why would they have arrested me if I hadn't done anything wrong?

Martin and Santino told about my resistance to questioning. They'd found my gray raincoat and hat in my closet with telltale mudstains identical with stains found at the scene of the crime, and on the victim's ravaged remains. Same mud was found on my car.

They said.

Miss Dorothy Travis testified

that she had been parked with a man in Jonathan's Grove Saturday night. She saw a car drive up, park nearby about a quarter until one a.m. She couldn't be mistaken about the car. It was mine. Same model, same style, same color. Dark blue. It was a clear moonlit night and I parked just in front of them. Probably didn't see her car because of some trees and brush, but she could see me and my car clearly enough. She saw me pull screaming Helen Logan out of the car. She didn't miss a trick. She saw and heard everything from the beginning to the end. She and her boy friend who was with her in the car were too scared to do anything about what they saw. By the time they realized what was happening it was too late. The way she described me with the bloody rock in my hand, running and shouting under the full moon, curled my hair. Then I realized again that she was talking about me. But the way she described it no one could blame anybody for keeping their noses out. After I drove off, she and her friend had a look. A very quick look. The Logan girl was dead.

Why hadn't she and her boyfriend reported it earlier? Why wait until Monday?

They were scared. But then she got to thinking about it, decided

it was her public duty to reveal all, even at the risk of her own and her boyfriend's life. Her boyfriend wasn't called in as a witness. No one seemed interested in his whereabouts.

No, there was no doubt about it. I was the man, or rather I was the fiend that walked like a man. Same face, same build, same hair color. Same raincoat and hat. I'd lost my hat, she said, and ran back to get it before I drove off.

Dunlap, the bartender, said I was in the Shamrock bar Saturday night. Been in there several nights before. He remembered me. Same face, same build, same coat and hat, same fiend. I was there when Helen Logan and her teenage escort came in and quarreled. I must have left about midnight. When had Helen Logan left the bar?

"'Bout the same time, maybe a little before."

Me? All I could say was what I had said before. The truth. I swore it was the truth. I swore I was innocent, that I had never even seen a girl like they described as Helen Logan.

I'd been in the same bar with her all evening and I claimed I hadn't even seen her!

Well, it was a dingy bar, I said. Big place, like a converted barn. Lot of people milling in cigarette smoke. Must have been many peo-

ple there I couldn't remember even if I'd noticed them. But I wasn't convincing. All I could tell them was the truth and I didn't sell it very well. I didn't sell it at all, wouldn't have sold it even if my heart had been in it because it wasn't a seller's market and my heart wasn't in it. I didn't give a hoot anymore. I felt that it had all been happening to someone else anyway, not to me. Maybe it was some kind of dream. Whatever it was, it was a terrible mistake.

Innocent men aren't sent to the electric chair. The law doesn't make mistakes like that. That wasn't convincing either.

Not nearly as convincing as D.A. McDonald, a powerful man with a convincing voice who could have sold ice-cream bars to Eskimos. Instead, he sold human fodder to the deathhouse. He elaborated on Miss Travis' testimony. He gave a ringing speech about my going out nights alone, cruising for helpless females. Again I was listening to words that could have nothing to do with me. Words about a human fiend, a cold-blooded sadistic murderer.

This fiend sneaked around looking for suitable victims. He saw Helen Logan and boyfriend quarrel, watched the boyfriend walk out on her, watched Helen Lo-

gan leave the Shamrock, saw it was his fiendish chance, followed her. More details about my crime, very fine details of everything I had done. The words were those of a preacher intending to condemn a man to hell-fire, spoken with absolute assurance. He dared anyone to deny his words. The only one there who wanted to deny them was Mercer and he didn't dare. McDonald would prove his words and demand a first-degree verdict.

Again I came out of that sleep-walking state enough to be reminded that they were still really talking about me. Ellis Thompson.

My Public Defender said I had nothing to say but the truth. I'd already said that. There wasn't any use taking up the court's valuable time repeating it. I had no proof, no witnesses. Nothing but the truth. The truth doesn't set you free. It condemns you to hell-fire. Nor is your strength really that of ten because your heart is pure.

Mercer's appeal that the truth should out received one violent reaction, an impatient request from the Judge that he should speak louder so he could be heard. Mercer declined to say anything else at all. That was fine with me. There was no use making my case any worse.

I was indicted for first-degree murder.

I was put away in a cell to await trial. My pictures were in all the newspapers. I'm not beautiful to begin with, but the pictures were not flattering. Before and after pictures of the victim were also displayed. References to me as a sub-human fiend skulking about nights were accompanied by rising pleas that I get the chair. Capital punishment enthusiasts triumphantly flourished my name as a prime example of what society could do without. There was renewed hope that mankind might be protected from incurable fiends like me.

My ex-wife's pictures were there too, with ripe quotations about her opinions of me. They were hardly flattering either.

It wouldn't have taken much more to convince me that everyone was right, that the world would be a safer and far more decent place if I were permanently stricken from the population roster.

Mercer even came to my cell, acting as if he were sorry for both of us. "Looks bad," he said.

"You're kidding," I said. "I wish I could pay for such expert opinion."

"Plead guilty, throw yourself on the mercy of the court, hope for a second-degree verdict," he advised.

"But I'm innocent," I reminded

him, quickly and emphatically.

"Then I don't know what to do," he said as if this was a great revelation. "Without a miracle, they'll electrocute you.

It really got to me then, like I'd been sleepwalking for sure and someone had jabbed a needle into me. I jumped at him out of my bunk as if I was coming out of dope from a dentist's chair. I grabbed and shook Mercer and yelled into his stupid face. He must be crazy! Everyone was crazy! I hadn't done anything wrong!

Mercer backed off. "We've got nothing on our side," he whined, as I sat down shivering, the sockets of my eyes grimy with exhaustion, and wanting to scream that it was crazy and that I was innocent. "Everything's against us. Thompson. Can't get witnesses. No money. No alibi. Their eye-witness, the Travis woman, she's okay. I checked her. Works as a waitress at Al's Diner near the Shamrock bar. McDonald's ambitious, wants a first-degree murder conviction too. Also May, June, July, they're bad seasons for defense. Dock's overloaded with murderers this time of year. Too many felons awaiting trial. They got to be cleared off the dock soon as possible. Prosecution and court want a quick routine trial, a first-degree murder conviction. Then right on

to the next case, no interruptions."

"But I'm innocent," I yelled.

"What else can I do?"

I told him. He could go to hell and never come back. If he came back I wouldn't be responsible for what I did. "Like they say," I said, "I can only fry once."

He left my cell hurriedly. I don't know where he went, but he didn't come back.

I felt trapped, hopeless, crazed with fear and despair. I wanted to yell, kick the walls. That wouldn't help either. I could only think that I was alone, going to die all alone without a chance.

They were going to murder me.

I woke up in the middle of the night thinking of a name.

Jim Ferras.

The criminal lawyer. The name just popped into my subconscious. I was wide awake then, remembering reading about Ferras in a magazine months before. Ferras was a lawyer who took the case of guys others disdained to touch for one reason or another, despite the tradition that everyone has a right to equal defense before the law. He took cases of guys who were written off, who weren't given a chance. Ferras was reputed to perform miracles for little guys in the courts.

That was for me. The only intelligent thing Mercer had said was

that only a miracle would save me. So I wrote a letter and sent it off with my cell guard, about as hopefully as a disillusioned kid writes a last letter to Santa.

Dear Mr. Ferras: I'm writing this as a last desperate appeal. I don't know you personally and of course you don't know me. I'm accused of murder but I'm an innocent man. I've been indicted. I've got a lawyer assigned by the court but he's a liability named Mercer. He's run out on me, given me up anyway. They're going to electrocute me. It doesn't seem to me that they have any evidence at all, just the testimony of one witness, a Miss Dorothy Travis. But she couldn't have seen me commit a murder because I didn't. I wasn't even there. I have no money, but will you help me?

Ellis Thompson

Sam Ferras, a slim man of medium height, calm, confident, smiling a little, came to see me in my cell the first thing the following afternoon.

He gave me a cigarette. Warm and sympathetically, but with bright alert eyes, he sat without saying a word and listened to my story. Then he stood up and shook hands with me.

"Do I have a chance?" I asked.

"We all have a chance until we're dead. Maybe even after that we

still have a chance," he said. "I'll get a copy of the Grand Jury records and interview everybody involved in the case. I'll find something. We've got one thing in our favor already, Thompson. One eye-witness, as you said in your letter, is about the only case they have. I'll go to work on that the very first thing."

"Thanks," I said.

"Don't mention it," he said. "Until later."

Ferras didn't sleep for three days. He explored every possibility, personality and circumstances bearing on the case. He interviewed the witnesses. He located the "man" who Dorothy Travis had said was with her in the parked car and shared her witness of the murder. Ferras got a statement from the "man." He got statements from the bartender Dunlap. He took these statements plus records from the local Weather Bureau directly to the Grand Jury.

Judge Winters heard Ferras. He read the statements. He had three men brought in to verify their statements. One of them was Dunlap. Dunlap insisted that he'd never said definitely that he'd seen me leave the bar *after* the Logan girl. Dunlap had sworn he saw me leave the bar around midnight

but wasn't sure now of the exact time. He wasn't certain when the Logan girl left either. He couldn't be more definite than that. Never had been. The D.A. had only made it *seem* that way. Nor had Dunlap ever said that he saw me with the Logan girl at the bar.

That evening Ferras came to see me again in my cell.

"What about my case?" I asked.

"What case?" he said.

I stared. He smiled.

"There isn't any case, Thompson. Never was. You're a free man. Come on and I'll buy you a drink."

I started to thank him, but my legs gave away and I fell on the floor.

Judge Winters had freed me of the first-degree murder indictment. The miracle had occurred. In clearing me, he declared that the State's alleged witness to the slaying, Dorothy Travis, a woman who claimed to have been parked in another car with a man, was "unworthy of belief."

The discredited witness had given the names of two different men as her companions at the time. She'd been drinking. She'd admitted under Ferras' questioning that she'd been drunk, had gotten mixed up as to just which man she was with. But one of the men denied being with her at all. The other said he was there but hadn't

seen anything out of the ordinary. He couldn't have seen anything, he said, because the night was pitch black. According to the weather bureau reports, he was right. On that particular night there had been no bright moonlight as Miss Travis had said, but thick clouds and no visible moon.

The man also testified that when Dorothy Travis was drunk she often saw things no one else could see or verify, and that she tended to make up fantastic stories.

She really had seen me before that night in the Shamrock bar. She'd seen me there several evenings. She could have been at the Shamrock earlier that Saturday night and had known I was there. She could therefore describe me, my coat, my hat, my car's color. But Ferras pointed out that no one could have told the color of a dark car at night, even if there had been moonlight. No one can distinguish at night the difference in color when the colors are green, blue, black or purple. In any case, namely mine, Miss Travis was a thoroughly discredited witness.

Ferras assured me that there was obvious criminal negligence on the State's part, and that all of those responsible for my persecution were guilty of criminal negligence. This was music to my ears, and Ferras went even further. He said their

conduct was inexcusable. Criminal negligence, he said, was too polite a term for it. No attempt had been made to establish beforehand the reliability of their one eye-witness. Nor was their treatment of me throughout excusable in any way. So said Ferras. I was his most convinced audience.

After all, I was the one who had nearly been murdered.

I had been on the razor's edge between life and death and only a miracle had saved me. I could just as easily have been a goat, sacrificed by an ambitious D.A. who wanted to chalk up another first-degree murder verdict to help him build up a reputation. So he could maybe run successfully for Mayor or Governor.

Incredible? It wasn't to me. I had experienced the horror. But how many innocent people have been murdered by the State?

There's no way of knowing. I only know that I could be dead and buried in a dishonorable grave for a crime I never could have committed.

I only know that "eternal vigilance is still the price of liberty".

So ended the article. The article that appeared in the Evening News and created a sensation. I enjoyed reading about myself. But it served a more practical purpose. It was good publicity. I would

need sympathy and public support.

You see, boys and girls, I was by this time suing the State. Turn about is fair play. Now it's my turn.

I took the article downtown to Ferras' office and threw it on his desk. But having considerable personal interest in my case, he'd already read it. "Good article," he said, looking at me uneasily as if beginning to suspect that there was more about me than met even his practiced legal eye. "It's convincing."

"The truth, right from the heart," I said.

"It'll help our case against the State," he said. "You want the money. I want a chance to bury that District Attorney."

"We've all got a right to pursue happiness," I said. "A law of the land. But that's pursuing an awful lot, isn't it? Is it too big?"

"We wouldn't have any better chance asking for less," he said. "Who can put a price on what you've suffered? The State can afford to pay and it's going to pay. People have got to be reminded now and then that they have a responsibility. The responsibility of electing decent men to public office."

"My sentiments exactly," I said. "Be seeing you. Let me know about any new developments. Call me at

the hotel if anything comes up.”

He said he would do that and I went downstairs to a public phone booth in a Crown Drug Store where I figured the phone wouldn't be tapped.

I called Dorothy Travis and got a busy signal. I dialed again. While I waited I thought back over the whole fantastic business from the beginning. I started to sweat. I felt weak just thinking about it, the big, crazy thing. If I'd thought about it that way before I did it, I'd never have risked my neck.

Most people never try anything big because they think about it first and it looks too big and they're scared off. I know because I was one of those scared suckers all my life. Until now.

So this is the way it really happened. Here it is in my own words.

I'd dropped into Al's Diner late Monday night. That was the day after Helen Logan's murder. All I knew about the crime was what I'd seen in the newspaper Monday morning.

I'd enjoyed sitting up late with Dorothy Travis in Al's Diner. It was usually deserted at that time and she was lonely, wanted someone to talk to as much as I did. She was like me, about my age. Cynical, disillusioned, embittered by never having made the big bucks. Her moods matched my own.

Like me, she was desperate about making one last big grab for the brass ring. But she didn't know how and had really given up hope. That's where she and I were different. I had realized all at once how to do it.

That Monday night, Dorothy talked about the Logan girl's murder. She said she was parked with an old friend in Jonathan's Grove that morning, right near where the murder was supposed to have occurred. It gave her the creeps, she said, to think it had happened just a little while before they drove in there and parked.

It was then I got the idea. The big one, the first and last big one of my life, because if they're big enough, one is all you ever need. It was big and crazy but it had me hooked like a shot of heroin. I told her about it. She said I was crazy and meant it, but she was hooked the same as I was.

“Crazy? You have to be crazy,” I said, “to make the big play. We've been careful, played small stakes, and here we are.”

“But so many things can go wrong,” she said.

“They always can,” I said. “Wait for the sure thing and finally you're dead. Then you don't have to worry. Listen, I'm sick and tired of small percentages.”

I explained what had given me

the idea. A guy in my hometown back in Missouri had sued the State for a similar injustice and collected enough to retire. "It's worth the risk. Anyway, I'm taking most of the risks. Worst can happen to you is you'll be called a liar. You can claim you were loaded, seeing things."

"Crazy, crazy," she said, but she was giggling and I knew we were going to try it. And she agreed. Monday night, late, she phoned in her description to the police. A description of me. She had the story we had worked out all prepared. A story with a big convenient hole already in it, just in case. The cops picked me up the same night, as it was so dramatically described in the article about me. Otherwise that article is true. It's misleading only in what's left out. But what people don't know never hurts them. Not much.

I'd had my moments of doubt in that cell. And brother, they were bad. But Dorothy came through with flying colors. Dangle enough loot in front of a woman and she can become the world's greatest actress in one lesson.

Now it was all over, but for the big payoff.

This time my call got through to Dorothy.

"Yeah," she said and I heard

Al's Diner dishes rattling in the background.

"Thompson here," I said, "Just left Ferras' office. It's going great."

"Lordy," she said. "Gives me the shivers yet. I wouldn't go through that again for the key to Fort Knox."

"Why should you? Who needs Fort Knox? Listen. Ferras just got back from filing my claim at the controller's office. He's charging that I was subjected to false arrest, unlawful imprisonment, illegal search and seizure, malicious prosecution, loss of job, damaged reputation, and that isn't the end. He's asking an additional \$50,000 as attorney fee. \$2,000 for loss of property. I really suffered."

"Crazy," she whispered. "When can I see you?"

"Got to be careful there", I said. "Until the case is cleared away. We'll make up for lost time, first in Acapulco."

"How much we getting?"

"A million bucks," I said. I guess it was too much for her. She didn't answer. I hung up and as I left the booth I felt a chill like a cold breath on my neck, but when I turned there was no one there. There never is. But I keep wondering. It bothers me.

Who really murdered Helen Logan?

*Many a man has been called to task for his practical jokes.
Here's one who turned a deaf ear inauspiciously, shall we say?*



WHEN I retired after forty years as a G.P., all I wanted was to get away from the big city to some place where the fishing was good, and never look at another coated tongue. I found the ideal spot up in Northern Wisconsin—a cabin near the little town of Mansfield, population twelve hundred.

There, on a beautiful lake, I had myself a great time, catching bass by the bucketful every day. But after a couple of weeks of this, I got hungry for some shop talk, and hiked in to Mansfield. The only doctor in town was a man named Marcom; he was also the coroner. I introduced myself, and before long we were deep in a discussion of the local diseases.

Marcom was a wizened little

guy, with small, shrewd eyes, but not exactly one of the Mayo brothers in terms of competence. His last contact with medical theory must have dated back many years, and even the notions that were still valid were pretty dim in his mind. Luckily, the people in town were a healthy lot, and Wisconsin air, free of dust and smog, would put life in a zombie.

When we were done with medicine as such, I asked him about his job as coroner. I didn't expect anything startling, of course. Perhaps a hunting accident, or possibly a drowning on the lake, which could

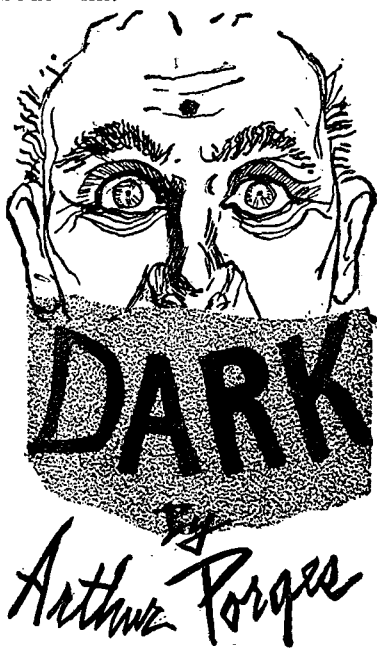
Shot in the

be quite tricky on windy days. But, as it happened, he came up with something rather unusual.

"If you'd been around here a couple of months ago," he said, "specially along that old trail past

the lake, things woulda been lively enough, believe me.

"Luke Rafter was alive then, and he was pure hell on strangers. Your fishing wouldn't have been so damned peaceful last summer, I can tell you. Old Luke, he was a natural. I bet they'd've grabbed him on TV if people outside knew about him.



"It was his voice. Oh, not singing; nothing like that. He had a terrific chest expansion, and could make the craziest noises. He used to follow some stranger along the trail, keeping out of sight in the brush, and give out these horrible sounds. Like nothing in God's

world. He could squall so you'd swear a big panther was ten yards away, just aching to gobble you down. But that wasn't the half of it. Most folks, even from the city, aren't too scared of animals. Hell, they been told there's nothing around here but a few black bears, and maybe a lynx or two. Some bobcats, of course, but they ain't much different from ordinary toms.

"But old Luke, he didn't waste much time on animals; that was just a warm-up, you might say. He invented real wild noises himself. Man, he was good! If you didn't know it was him out there, you'd think all sorts of things. Monsters, I mean. You never heard such awful snarling, growling, and choky, bubbling sounds. It was bad enough by day, but at night, if two or three strangers was sitting around their fire, old Luke could really work up a scare.

"Why, some people, caught on the trail after dark, or even with the fire in camp, would get so jittery they'd just cut and run—leave all their stuff behind!

"But, usually, when he had 'em petrified, old Luke'd come out, and say: 'I scared you real good, didn't I? No hard feelings.' And he'd shake hands. Sometimes, they never would see him until morn-

ing; he'd keep at it all night.

"Of course, some people were so mad they wanted to clobber him. A few even tried; but old Luke, he was built like a gorilla, and didn't like bad sports. He beat up a couple city folks real bad once. Then the sheriff told him to take it easy, and stick to the scaring part.

"Well, this last time, just about six weeks ago, a fellar come down the old trail with his wife. Luke was right on the job, following them from late afternoon until they camped. How was Luke to know the woman wasn't well—bad aneurysm. Luke never was too bright, but lots of fun, I tell you. We sure miss him around here.

"Luke hoorahed them two most of the night, and the woman was really scared. I guess her husband—name of Brackett—figured she couldn't take it much longer. If he'd known it was just a man out there, he'd o' begged him to stop; and maybe Luke would of, at that, with a sick woman and all. But Brackett had no idea what was making all those terrible noises. All he knew was that his wife come near dying. So he did what a lot of 'em used to do when Luke fooled around that way. He took his .22 pistol and banged away in all directions. It was the damndest thing. Luke never got caught be-

fore. He must have been awful careless this time. A little bitty .22, imagine! Luke could see the people he was scaring; they had a fire at night. But out in the woods, a hundred or so feet away, nobody could get a line on him. So when anybody blazed away, old Luke used to duck behind a thick tree and wait until they got tired of firing at nothing.

"But I guess he wasn't afraid of a .22, because one of Brackett's wild shots caught him right between the eyes. Killed him dead-er'n a mackerel.

"Well, you couldn't rightly say it was murder, or even manslaughter. Brackett had no idea he was shooting at a man. So we had to let him off. Now old Luke's gone, and things are mighty dull around here.

"Maybe you'd like to see what he looked like. I got a young fellar here in town who takes my official pictures; you know, anybody found dead the law likes a record for the files. Lemme get this one of Luke."

He rummaged through a messy file case, and came up with an eight by ten glossy, a very good job. There was Luke, flat on his back, eyes wide open, with a little black spot in the center of his forehead. The camera focus must have been perfect, because every

detail was sharp. I took a good look, and something clicked in my mind. A doctor is trained to see a lot in a hurry.

"Say," I began. "Didn't you tell me—" Then I broke it off.

"What?" Marcom demanded, his little eyes getting bead-y.

"Nothing," I said. "He was a big man, all right."

"Old Luke was sure fun," the coroner said regretfully. "He had one snarl—Monster from Outer Space he called it—that would make your hair curl even in broad daylight when you knew he was doing it."

I didn't say anything, but my mind was forming a different, truer picture of the killing. I'm sure that Brackett after a long, terrible night with his desperately ill wife, saw Luke Rafter come in at sunrise, holding out a great, hairy hand, and expecting prompt forgiveness. The man must have taken his pistol and deliberately shot Luke Rafter through the head from a few yards away. Then he carried the body a hundred feet into the woods so that people would think the victim had been hit by a stray bullet fired wildly

at night into impenetrable darkness.

Frank Brackett was either wise or lucky. He stayed far enough from the victim to avoid powder burns on Luke's face; but at the same time was smart enough not to carry the body too far off. A .22 might not make the same kind of wound fifty yards away as it does at five; but experts say nothing can be told about intermediate ranges from the kind of hole.

The one thing he did goof on, Marcom also missed. Right in that clear photograph anybody could see the tiny, contracted pupils of Luke's eyes, proving that he was shot while the bright morning sun was blazing down. If he'd actually been killed at night, many feet from the fire, those pupils would have been fully expanded. My guess is that the photo was taken very soon after death, too; because otherwise the eyes get badly filmed.

Well, maybe it was my duty to expose a murder. But I can feel for Brackett, who must have been moved by overpowering rage at the big clown who almost killed his wife. Besides, I take a dim view of practical jokers myself.

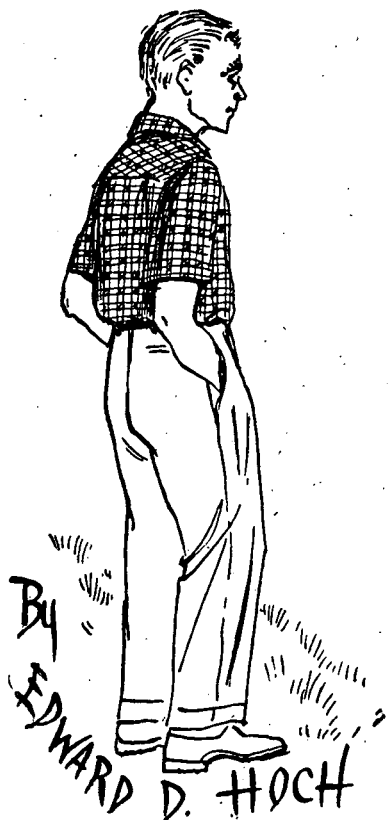
THE CAR RADIO thundering a Sunday afternoon concert into my ear, the sun bleaching out my hair exposed in the topless auto, I wheeled briskly up the familiar park road searching for them. They always came to the same general area, the same hilltop with its vagrant view of distant beach and specks of suited swimmers,

just far enough away to unttempt husbands with roving eyes and satisfy wives with children to guard. Today, breeze blowing off the lake, rustling leaves at their summer peakness, was surely a day when the picnic people would be out. All of them.

I spied Fred Dutton's car first, parked with three wheels off the road, sporty and casual like its owner, top up and windows cautiously closed, also like its owner. Surely he could have reached it before any of the less than occasional overhead clouds grouped into a threat of rain, but Fred Dutton was like that. Take no chances. Play it safe. Better safe than sorry. Fred Dutton.

I parked behind him, purposely kissing his bumper a bit harder than necessary, enjoying myself at the thought of the dent I might be leaving in it. Almost I expected him to come running at the sound, but they were just out of sight, down the hill hidden by the willows along the edge of the pond. It was a pleasant place, bringing back half-forgotten memories of days without care and nights when only the happiness mattered. I'd been the one in those days, and I wondered if I still was.

Dora, Fred's wife, saw me first. She was boiling water on the camp stove for her usual cup of



Once you have lost face with your friends it is next to impossible to win them back, as this bewildered fellow learned when he rejoined his hometown group.

tea and she jerked her hand back with such sudden shock that the pan of water clattered to the ground. "Why—Sam!"

"Hello, Dora. Glad to see you remember me." The grass seemed suddenly damp through my shoes, and I was vaguely aware that the children had been splashing here.

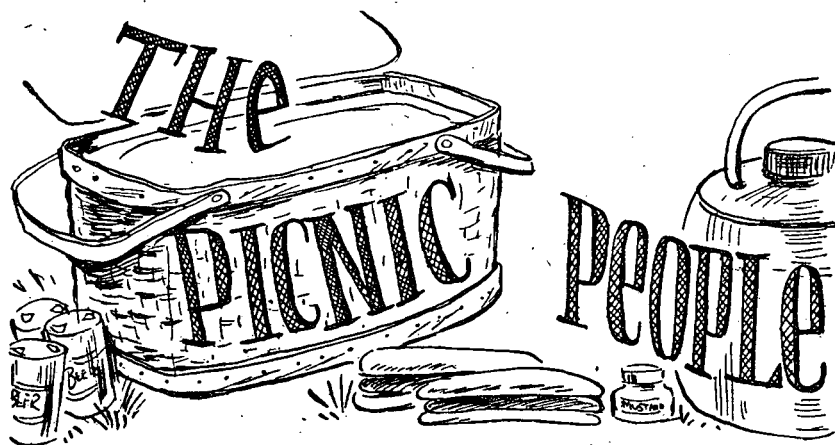
"Sam!" She turned her head. "Fred, come here! It's Sam—Sam Waggel." Her voice almost broke as she said it.

Fred came running, and the rest—except for the children—weren't far behind. They came cautiously at first, as if viewing a beast newly

escaped from the zoo. Then they crowded around, the foolish false grins on their faces, greeting me.

"Sam boy, how the heck you been?" This was a real estate broker named Charlie Thames, who'd never really liked me on my best of days. Charlie hadn't changed much, put on a few pounds maybe, but hadn't we all. His wife Laura startled me a bit with her graying hair, but the rest of them were pretty much the same.

Fred Dutton had his arm around my shoulder almost at once, as if I'd never been away,



pressing a sweating can of beer into my hand. "When'd you get out, Sam? Why'd you let us know? How you feelin'?"

"Well enough, Fred," I said, answering his last question first. "I got out a couple days ago. Called your and Charlie's homes but when nobody answered I figured you were probably out picnicking at the old place."

"Hello, Sam." This was Jean O'Brian—Jean Falconi now, of course—a girl who'd meant a lot to me once. She was wearing white shorts that showed off her legs. She's always had the best legs in the crowd. Her husband, Joe, came into view then too, carrying the youngest of the children in his arms.

"Hi, Jean. Joe. The kids are really growing up."

"Have a hot dog, Sam," Charlie offered. "We got plenty."

Laura, as if to back up the words, went to get one off the grill. "Here, Sam. Just the way you used to like them."

"Used to, Laura? I still do. Nothing's changed that much."

She flushed slightly and turned away, but Dora Dutton was there to take her place. "Do you want to talk about it, Sam? We don't want . . ."

"Sure. What do you want to know? If you've finished eating I

can give you some wonderful descriptions of the shock treatments and the after effects of the drugs they were feeding me."

"Go play," Charlie said to one of the children who wandered up. "Go play with your sister." His face was hard and set. Already he was remembering his old Sam-hatred from the days before the trouble.

"Sam," Joe Falconi said, speaking with that sort of almost-accent; "what about the charges? Are you going to have to stand trial now that you're out?" Joe was a contractor, a good guy as guys went. "No," I told them, taking my time about lighting a cigarette, letting all damned six of them know I was out for good, here to stay, ready for action. "Remember, the court ruled I was insane at the time I did it. But I'm all right now, all cured. All."

"Well," Fred Dutton said, "well, that's damned good. All cured, huh?"

"All cured."

But Jean wasn't quite so convinced. "It's only been two years, Sam. Are you sure? I mean . . ."

I just sort of laughed at her. She did look funny standing there, under the willow, thinking about how this guy she once 'necked' with over in West Park might now be a homicidal maniac and what

the hell was he doing walking around loose just two years after it happened. Thinking about it.

Charlie and Laura sort of drifted off, pretending to hike after the kids, and Dora started the water for her tea again. After all the excitement of my arrival they were acting now as if I'd never been away. Or were they acting as if I'd never come back?

Joe Falconi brought me a beer to go with the hot dog. "It's good to see you again, boy. Come on, let's walk down by the water."

We strolled away from the others, kicking at stones, watching them skip and finally splash in the sparkling pond, stirring here and there an eddy of mud in the tranquil waters. "Your kids are growing," I said. "You and Jean just have the two?"

"No," he answered, a bit embarrassed. "We had another boy last year. I guess you didn't hear."

"Communications weren't too good in there. Especially when none of my old friends ever came to see me."

"Sam . . ."

"What?" I kicked at a loose stone.

"Sam, I don't blame you for being a bit bitter, but you've got to look at it from our point of view."

"Sure," I told him with a smile. "You figured I was locked up in

the nut house for the rest of my natural life, so why the hell should anybody bother about me. Right? It was just as if I was dead too, along with her."

"Sam. You don't know what you do to me when you talk like that. Hell, they wouldn't even let anyone see you at first, you know that. We didn't know how bad you were or anything about it. You know the way the newspapers treat a story like that."

"Sure. Frankly, I was surprised they didn't have a gang of reporters waiting for me the other day."

"Look, Sam . . . I know the construction business isn't your line, but if you need a job to tide you over for a while, I could probably fix you up."

"Thanks, Joe. About the only thing I've done for the past two years is make baskets. They have some weird ideas of mental therapy in those places. Maybe I'll take you up on it."

From somewhere behind us we heard Jean calling to him. "I have to get back. She has quite a time with those kids."

I followed him part of the way, but paused a bit by one of the playing children. It was a little girl, unmistakably one of Charlie and Laura's children. "How are you?" I asked her.

"Fine," she answered a bit un-



certainly at the question from a stranger.

"You don't remember me. You were just born when I went away." I pulled at a few willow leaves and tickled her nose with them. "What's your name? I forgot it."

But before the child could answer, Laura Thames had appeared from somewhere. "Sam, please leave Katie alone."

"What?" I hadn't quite understood her unexpected words.

"I'm sorry, Sam. Really I am. But I don't want you to get near the children."

"Sure." I stood up and walked back to where the others stood too casually around the charcoal stove. Dora was drinking her tea, while Fred played with a rumpled deck of cards.

"Sam," Charlie Thames said, "what do you plan to do with yourself? Plan to stay around town long?"

"Why not? It's my home." I was conscious of the sun a bit lower in

the afternoon sky, the birds not quite as chirping as before.

"Sure. I was just thinking that you might want to go away to some place where people didn't know about the . . . trouble. You know." Charlie was smiling. Keeping it friendly. The smiler with the knife. Chaucer. Charlie Damned Chaucer Thames.

"Thanks for the advice, Charlie."

"New York or someplace. You know, big city. Hell, I was reading the other day that most of the people in Manhattan are nuts anyway."

"Charlie!" This from Laura, warning, rebuking. Charlie glanced at her and heeded the warning. He shut up suddenly and walked over to inspect the dying embers of the charcoal fire.

"Guess I'd better be going," I told them, all of them, not one in particular, because all of them thought alike. Even good old Joe with his offers of a job until I could find something better. Maybe they thought I was going to work on their wives next. Maybe they thought their children weren't safe around a homicidal maniac—even a certified cured homicidal maniac. Maybe, hell.

"It looks a little like rain," Jean was agreeing. "Maybe we'd all better start packing up." I followed her gaze toward the single small

black cloud moving fast in the eastern sky and almost laughed in her pretty face. They were all damned scared of old Sam.

I walked vaguely back in the direction of the cars, knowing, feeling that six pairs of eyes were boring holes in my back. "So long," I called out, half turning toward them for a final wave. It hadn't been much of a visit, not much of a one at all.

Fred Dutton ran after me and caught me at the top of the hill. "Sam, look, come over to the house some night, huh?"

"Sure, Fred."

"Don't be bitter."

"I'm not. Guess I just thought everything would be the same, like the old days."

Fred Dutton looked suddenly solemn. "There were eight of us in the old days, Sam. There aren't any more. It can't ever be the same, I guess. You gotta understand that."

"Sure. I'll call you, Fred."

"Do that."

I went on down the hill and opened my car door. I guess I would have gone on home after all if I hadn't seen the kid again just then. Katie Thames, in her red shorts and striped shirt, wandering over the top of the hill. She must have been almost three. I could remember the night she was

born, when things were so much better.

"Katie, Katie-girl!" I called softly. "Come here, doll."

She came, a bit uncertainly, but remembering me now from our meeting of only moments before. "Hello," she said.

"Come on, Katie, let's run down by the water and play. Let's sneak down real quiet, so mommy and daddy don't hear us." Yes, before I left, before I went out of their lives for good, I'd give them something to remember me by—especially Charlie and Laura.

We made our way through the underbrush and came out suddenly near the point where Joe and I had been walking. I led her around to the other side of the pond, though, until I was sure we would be in view of the picnic people—in view but out of touch. Let them scream and carry on then, damn them. Let them tell me to leave their precious kids alone.

"Here, Katie. We'll play a little game. Up here." I motioned her up on a rock, and watched her running with all the vigor and anticipation of a two-year-old. The rock jutted out a bit over the still, mirrored surface of the pond, and I knew from the old days that the kids often used it as a sort of diving-board for illegal swimming.

Now, my breath coming faster,

I waited until she was within reach of my hands. Then I grabbed her up, suddenly, before she could give more than a little gasp. I held her by her tiny ankles and dangled her from the rock, upside down over the stagnant waiting waters.

"Scream now!" I told her. "Scream your head off! I'm going to drop you." And I let her fall suddenly a few inches toward the water.

She screamed, a high tiny sound that barely managed to drive the birds from the nearest trees. And I wondered if they would hear. I wondered if they would come running to rescue her. I wondered if I would really let her tiny body drop into the water, perhaps just too soon to be rescued. She was not like the other one, not at all like the other one. She was too helpless, even for the killing, too small for anything like picnics. She needed to grow up, just as cattle must be fattened for market, needed to live.

"Scream! Louder!"

"Sam! You crazy fool!"

It was Joe Falconi in the lead,

splashing across the very middle of the shallow pond. Joe Falconi, up to his chest in the dirty water. And Laura, screaming in terror. Charlie, running toward me as he shouted a string of curses. Fred and Dora and Jean. Beautiful Jean. All horrified. Six horrified humans. Let her fall. Let her fall now. Give them a scare.

But already Joe was beneath me, smashing the reflecting surface of the pool, holding out his arms to catch her. Already Charlie and Fred were grappling with me, pulling me back from the edge.

"Somebody call the police!"

"Hold him down! Hold him!"

"He's cracked up—really crazy."

And Laura, screaming. "God, he would have killed her. He wanted to kill her."

I didn't struggle. I looked up into the fearful eyes of Charlie Thames, sitting on my chest, holding me down. OK, Charlie, but I gave you a scare, didn't I? Didn't I?

And above me the trees whispered in the wind, the clouds . . . what did the clouds do . . . ?

Every Friday

The new television show ALFRED HITCHCOCK PRESENTS, is one hour long, and will be seen on Friday evenings, at 9:30 PM, on the CBS network.

An expert in any field of endeavor is apt to outwit himself quite innocently. Here is a deadly Lothario who sets out to victimize a lovely girl only to learn she's much wiser than she looks.

HE RECOGNIZED the new one the moment he saw her. By this time he usually did. An expert in any profession will develop a seeming instinct that is really a lightning judgment based on past experi-



*By
Shirley Ann
Jay*



EXpert

ences. Across the years all those little trial-and-errors added up to let him now look and know.

He had often thought, whimsically perhaps, of writing some kind of course of instruction on

his subject. The world was panting with desire to know how-to-do-it, whatever it was; be it golf, or bridge, or shipbuilding. In his case—in modesty, he was a master. That was obvious. He knew all the steps; he knew all the signs. If he were writing, he thought, he would stress the first step as the most important. It was, of course, the SELECTION.

She was sitting at one of the smaller tables, and the number of men and women was uneven. That was a help. Aboard ship you couldn't count too much on the waiters. In a hotel, for instance, a single woman at a bad table immediately drew his attention. Here he looked instead for that first-night stiffness. Early in the trip the ones who knew each other usually hung together for security; it made it easy to pick those who were alone.

The clothes must be just right. Dowdy clothes often meant money, but usually accustomed money, which he avoided. Anything elegant or well-chosen meant the same. What he watched for was the obviously new, the obviously uncomfortable, the much too stylish—the rich clothes often cluttered by jewels and worn with an elaborate hairdo. Most of all he was looking for that certain air, that kind of desperation, of someone

trying too hard to spend money that arrived too late.

She had the air, and she had the clothes. She sat awkwardly, responding with difficulty to the overtures of her tablemates. The waiter seemed to make her nervous, and it looked from where he sat as if she wore too many rings. All of this he noted, consciously, during the meal. But really, the first moment he looked at her, he knew. The selection was over.

He was pleased. As an expert, his timing of these things was usually perfect, but this once it had been a little too long. Almost long enough to make him try to hurry. The time it would take seemed so futile. He sat there, looking at her, and knew exactly what was to happen in the next few months. If only he could simply speak to her and get it over that night. Much more sensible, and the end the same. Instead, slowly, carefully, he must work on the next step, the APPROACH.

It wasn't that the approach was difficult. An attractive, obviously well-to-do man—even if no longer very young—has no difficulty making acquaintances. After all, a woman alone on shipboard, or at a resort hotel, usually has at least some dim thought that *maybe* she might meet—someone. But with his kind the thought was often

very dim and hidden. A too forthright attack might scare it away altogether. The prey would vanish—would be sorry, would regret, but would run all the same. So it must be done casually. A brush past a table, knocking off a napkin, or a purse—anything that allowed a quick and a still graceful stoop, a smile and charming apology, and then out of the way. Let it register. Let the face be remembered so the next day a nod and a “good-morning” were not out of place. A little later, a word or two; still later a short conversation, maybe a cup of coffee—a bit of hesitancy, as a scrupulous gentleman might feel about being too forward with a lady. The shy approach was safer—and, he felt, more artistic—than the usual romantic, passionate gambit; and after a certain age—at *his* age—the latter began to look pretty silly.

It took him a while to make the opening. The table bit was out, since she was half way around the room from him; and once in the lounge she kept prowling around so restlessly he couldn't get near without appearing to dog her. She did stop at the little ship's library, which looked promising, but she moved off after selecting a book in which no self-respecting gentleman could possibly have expressed interest. This was disappointing; he

had no tastes himself, but could put up a fine show of liking detective stories, war novels, painting, opera, or even poetry. He took an artist's pleasure in the effort.

Finally she glanced nervously at her watch and hurried from the lounge. It was early, but she probably was headed for the movie. First night out many people did see the movie. After a moment or so he followed, slowly and casually, mostly to keep her in sight. He wouldn't dream of sitting next to her, but riding down in the elevator might serve for an introduction. It didn't; she was gone. He arrived at A deck beginning to feel disgruntled. However, as usually happened sooner or later, he was lucky. She was standing there with the familiar bewildered look of the new traveler.

“Looking for the movie?” he asked politely.

“Oh, yes—could—do you know—the elevator doesn't seem—,” she stopped, embarrassed, blushing—rather charming in a helpless way. He allowed himself a pleasant but not too-friendly smile.

“It's always confusing the first night. For some reason the elevator to C deck is on the other side—no one has ever understood quite why. Just go down that corridor and around and you'll see it right there—sign and all.”

"Oh, thank you. This—this is my first trip."

"Then I hope you enjoy it thoroughly." He gave a little bow and moved away, perhaps to her disappointment. Rather than follow too closely he wasted some time in the ship's store. Actually he would not have bothered with the movie except for its possible value as a conversation. He was not a man who cared to be entertained. Comfort he liked—good food, fine clothes, swift service. Apart from that his interest lay in his work. He felt himself to be particularly successful, and took pride in it. His greatest pleasure was in the intellectual satisfaction of the planning; the next in watching his own expert execution of those plans. And perhaps the third pleasure was in reading of the many less successful—and less expert—than himself. At the moment he had done, he felt, quite well. The approach was over.

He thought of the third step as the SECURING. Once he might have said the WOOING, but that was too old-fashioned and too romantic. He never stressed romance; it was implied, of course, but not over-done. Companionship was the key note—on ship companionship was easy, and as usual in these cases she was desperately lonely. She just wanted to be sure

it was *all right*; as, of course, with an expert it would be. He followed the normal outline. Early along he asked if her husband had passed away. In the usual embarrassed and slightly flattered manner she explained she was unmarried. This always surprised him greatly. He stressed the fact—which was quite true—that he, himself, was a widower. Both facts were important. He never dealt with widows—no widow, he felt, could have what he considered a safe level of innocence. On the other hand a man who has lost his wife is an object of pity—and pity was a highly satisfactory emotion to arouse. Again there was the question of timing; the wife's death must have been recent enough to evoke sympathy but not so close as to imply violent emotion. It should be time for a new love, at least a new companion to ease the loneliness. With him it was always just that time.

Her mother had recently died. After years of being an only child and upper servant, she now had money and freedom and no idea what to do with either. So she traveled.

"I've always wanted to travel," she confided wistfully, as if the words and idea were her own and not the echo of all those many lonely women before her.

The cruise went on; they were

more and more together; it became a matter of course. Very slightly her anxious, hesitant manner began to change to that of a woman with a man in attendance, and some of the other passengers were smiling a little at this gentle, late romance.

The night before they docked he took her hand and spoke with becoming gravity.

"I want to call you. I've been lonesome a long time, and this cruise has been very special to me. I hope it's been a little special to you."

"Oh, yes!"

"And I may call you?"

"Oh, yes!"

There was an unexpected difficulty. He had seen her a few times in the city and finally, hesitantly had asked her to share his autumn

of life, to bring back to him the companionship he missed. In her fluttery, rather charming way she had accepted, and agreed to an early marriage. The next day, at his hotel, he was confronted by her lawyer—Mr. Growse, according to the card—a straight, slim, stern man about his own age. A disapproving man; a suspicious man.

"You must realize," the lawyer said coldly, "that I am only acting in your—ah—fiancée's best interest. She has recently come into a considerable amount of money. She would not be the first woman of her age and ah—experience to—"

"Be taken in by a fortune hunter?" he suggested pleasantly.

"I understand you're considering mutual wills?"

"Hardly unusual in a husband and wife. And, unfortunately,

Dear Fans:

My desk is so weighed down with mail, requesting information about the Alfred Hitchcock Fan Club, I hope you won't mind if I reply in an open letter. Here are the particulars:

Membership dues are fifty cents which covers mailing costs and handling. (Please send coins or money orders, no stamps.) For this you will receive an autographed photo of Mr. Hitchcock, his biography, and a bulletin of current news, which will be issued four times a year. You can't imagine how rewarding it is to hear from so many loyal readers, and active, and incoming Fan Club members. I want to thank all of you for your enthusiastic interest.

Most sincerely,
Pat Hitchcock
P.O. Box 434
Tarzana, California

neither of us is so young as to consider it a matter safely put off."

"I know nothing of you, sir."

"Nor I of you, Mr. Growse—nor do I care. I can safely support my wife—that you may check, if you wish, with my bank. As to the rest—that, I think, is our business."

He didn't like it. Some kind of lawyer was to be expected, but experience had led him to anticipate, in this situation, a less personal interest. On principle he disliked lawyers, the class he found most prone to make difficulties. This one he disliked particularly. However, he had handled others, and it was too late to back out without definitely appearing suspicious.

Growse made trouble to the last. He fussed, he suggested waiting, he wanted special clauses in the wills. It was upsetting, but it was too late. She could not be turned back; it had become too important. So the wedding took place, and the securing was over. The EXECUTION remained.

It could not be a rush job. In consideration of Growse it was necessary to remain in the city and spend some time as a devoted husband. That wasn't difficult. She was not, as has been mentioned, without a peculiar charm, and she so obviously worshipped him. Romance had come, however late,

and in its glow she flowered, as women will. Except for the lawyer, their few acquaintances smiled, gently and with a little pity, at her adoration.

She waited on him, even to the extent of drawing his bath. The last thing he remembered of her was as she stood in the bathroom door. He was in the tub at the moment, soaking comfortably and listening to the news. He looked up in surprise when she opened the door. The steamy air made her appear to waver a little and she was blushing and embarrassed. At the moment the thought flashed upon him of how she loved him; and that he would miss her.

"I forgot your fresh towels, darling," she said—and reaching over tipped the radio into the bathtub.


Growse came to see her after the funeral. She was still in black, her expressive face wearing that stricken look which was exciting so much sympathy. The lawyer was displeased.

"Only about \$25,000—after taxes. Hardly worth the bother."

"I'm sorry," she said. "He looked like more. We'll do better next time. After all darling," she smiled and patted his hand, "even experts make mistakes."

The execution was over.

ROUGH JUSTICE



By
P.A.T. Wilde

CHARLIE CONROY and I were playing two-handed bridge when I glanced up and saw the newcomer standing in the entrance to the card room. We'd been outward bound on the S.S. Baranda from London to Sydney, Australia, for over a month so it was a change to see a new face. I guessed he'd come aboard that afternoon at Auckland, New Zealand, for the five-day trip to Sydney.

His clothes were expensive and he walked and looked about him with the air of a man who is used to having his own way. But the small, avaricious eyes set in a fat pink face and the roll of fat over his collar didn't improve his ap-

Travel has a way of accidentally bringing together old friends from remote corners of the earth. In this story of human tensions, how a man deals with his remote past will surprise you, as it surprised him.

pearance. He went over to a group of men who most evenings played poker together. He apparently knew one of them, for he was introduced to the others and took a seat.

I thought no more of him. But when, a little while later, I turned to Charlie Conroy and asked him if he'd have a drink I noticed he was staring intently at the newcomer. He appeared not to have heard me. After a couple of seconds Charlie turned to me suddenly and I caught a glimpse of such naked, malevolent hatred in his blue eyes that for a moment I was shocked. I watched his expression change as he looked at me. It was as though he'd been surprised in a dream.

"I'm so sorry," he said in his gentle voice, "I'm afraid I was miles away."

I only knew Charlie as a shipboard acquaintance. He was a pleasant, kindly man, more inclined to listen to others than to talk about himself. But I learned he was a mining engineer and had had a hard life in his early days in what Australians call the "out-back"—the primitive lonely parts of that vast continent. His face was open and friendly and his blue eyes, deep-set beneath shaggy eyebrows, had that look that people have who are used to seeing

long distances. I frankly envied him, for he had a natural ability for making friends. He didn't look as if he could wittingly hurt anybody. Everybody on board liked him.

We had got in the habit of playing cards together in the evening or just sitting talking in the card-room, but since the arrival of the stranger, whose name I'd found out was Rawson, Charlie didn't seem able to settle to anything. If he was playing solitaire he'd be constantly glancing up to look at Rawson. At other times I'd notice him lying back in a chair, his eyes narrowed in the smoke from his pipe, apparently far away but in reality watching Rawson with a speculative sort of look. He seemed to be unable to keep his eyes off him. If Rawson noticed anything he had excellent self control, for he gave no sign. I know if I'd been in his shoes it would have bothered me.

I knew slightly all of the men playing poker with Rawson. They were in mining, metals, shipbuilding and things like that. Though they were wealthy men—Dennison and McGill were millionaires—none of them was as flashy as Rawson. Beside him on the table he kept a stack of money as well as a gold-tipped crocodile cigar case, a solid gold lighter and cigar

cutter, and on a fat finger a large diamond sparkled ostentatiously. He played loudly, cursing his luck when he lost and bragging when he won. He was constantly shouting for the steward, who was kept busy fetching trays of brandies and whiskeys. I didn't like Mr. Rawson, and from what I had seen neither did Charlie. But I was sure that in his case it was for another and more important reason, for he had lost his normal cheerfulness—it was obvious that something was troubling him. But much as I longed to know what it was, I didn't feel I knew him well enough to ask.

As we approached the continent and left deep water the sea started to kick up a little. The ship would give a sudden roll or lift with a lurch—it wasn't much, but after being used to the steady movement it was disconcerting. A glass slid across a table and crashed to the floor, and the stewards came and put up the fiddles around the tables.

It was our last night on board, for we were due to dock in Sydney harbor at noon next day, and there was a restless air about the ship. Nobody seemed able to settle to anything—even the poker players had given up and were content to let Rawson entertain them with card tricks. He was in his element

—the center of attention. There was no doubt about his skill. Even with his fat fingers he handled the cards like a professional. With studied negligence he shuffled the cards by springing them from his hands in a glittering cascade. It takes some doing, and he didn't even trouble to watch them. After he'd done all the usual tricks like picking a card out of someone's pocket, he did one I'd never seen before. He took a card—the ace of diamonds—and showed it all round. He put it back in the pack and after shuffling dealt six hands face down on the table. Then without hesitation he pointed to one of the hands—when it was turned up, there was the ace of diamonds. No one could figure out how he did it. He could deal a card into any hand he wished with no one the wiser. Charlie was leaning forward, watching intently.

"The last time I saw that done was at Summit Diggings," he said in a voice that all could hear.

Everyone turned to look at him. "Summit Diggings!" exclaimed McGill, "when were you there?"

Before Charlie could reply Dennison got up.

"Why don't you chaps join us—it's our last night on board—let's have a party."

Our tables were pushed together and we were introduced to Raw-

son, Dennison called to the steward to bring a couple of bottles of champagne and McGill turned to Charlie.

"So you're an opal digger?"

"Not any more—that was thirty years ago—I had a bellyfull."

"So did I. That's dangerous country," McGill looked around at us, "hundreds of miles from anywhere—right on the edge of the Great Desert—you could fry an egg on a shovel in the sun in one minute flat. A chap had to be tough to do any good out there, didn't he?" McGill said.

Charlie nodded. Like most millionaires McGill liked to talk of his hard beginnings.

"Did you make a fortune?" Dennison asked Charlie.

"Yes and no," he said slowly.

There was something in the way he said it and the glance he shot at Rawson. I don't think anyone else noticed it. Rawson's fat face was impassive—you couldn't tell what he was thinking—but his hands were fiddling with the cards. Perhaps he was irritated at no longer being the center of attention, for it was obvious no one was interested in card tricks any more. Charlie lit his pipe and blew a cloud of smoke.

"I worked at Summit for close on a year with Dan Horgan, an old timer, and a young chap, An-

gus MacDonald, just out from Scotland. Angus didn't know much but he was a worker and we were able to cover a lot of ground."

"You only had to dig down about six feet there if I remember rightly," McGill interrupted.

Dennison looked surprised. "Six feet—is that all?"

"That's right," Charlie said. "You dig till you come to a layer of ironstone, then you break through that and dig a couple of feet more. But now comes the tough part. You have to tunnel along under the ironstone, lying on your back and with only a candle for light, picking the opal from the underside of the ironstone and trying not to crack it. I tell you it's heart-breaking work. But we stuck to it till we'd got twelve hundred ounces. That doesn't sound much, but first grade orange fire opal was selling for more than sixty dollars an ounce in those days. We'd somewhere near seventy-five thousand dollars coming to us and we were splitting three ways."

I had never heard him as talkative as this and I had a definite feeling that he was up to something and that it had to do with Rawson. But Rawson appeared to be completely at ease. His little eyes were observing Charlie. I don't know whether I was imagin-

ing it but I had the impression it was a look of contempt.

"I'll never forget that last night in camp," Charlie went on. "We were sitting around the table—it was really a table top without legs—made from rough cut timbers, but it served well. Summit was an old camp and there was plenty of disused stuff about to build a shack and anything else we wanted. And we sat in chairs made from candle boxes."

"That takes me back," said McGill.

"Well, we weighed out our opal," Charlie said, "twelve hundred and seven ounces of it—and in the light of a dozen candles the table was a blaze of orange fire. I'll tell you it made a sight. When we'd divided it up and finished telling each other all the fine things we were going to do, we settled down to our last game of poker.

"We'd been playing for over an hour and I couldn't go wrong. Angus had lost—but not much—he was a canny player. Horgan had gone down for a packet and he was sullen. He was a bad loser at the best of times. And when finally I called his bluff and took a pot as big as your hat, his face literally went livid with rage—he was beside himself. I'd put a hand on the table to gather up the cards when

like a flash he drew a knife. I saw it coming too late. With a sweeping overhand motion he brought it down with all his strength—clean through my hand it went, pinning it to the table."

Charlie was breathing hard—beads of sweat stood out on his head and his deep-set eyes were pinpointed of light, and when he slapped his right hand down on the table for us to see, there wasn't a man of us that didn't jump. It was a big hand with long fingers, and hairy. From the base of the knuckles to near the wrist there extended a lens shaped scar, smoothly livid and without a hair on it. I could almost see a double-edged knife pinning it to the table.

"What did you do?" someone asked.

"There was little I could do. Horgan screamed at me, 'Cheat—you bloody rotten cheat,' and swift as a cat he came round my side of the table. He bent down beside my seat and came up with a card in his hand. He'd palmed it very cleverly—he was good at tricks. It was a low card—the two or three of hearts. He threw it on the table in front of Angus and put on a big act. He made out I'd hidden an ace, slipped it into my hand and dropped the small card when I thought I wasn't watched. I knew immediately what he was up

to. I tried to warn Angus but it was no good. He wouldn't believe me.

"'Go and get our things together,' Horgan shouted, 'I'm not sleeping one bloody night with a rotten cheat. It's a full moon and we'll travel cool.'

"Give Angus his due, he looked shocked. 'We can't leave him like this,' he said.

"Horgan grabbed him by the shoulder. 'Listen, young feller—down here a cheat gets rough justice. I'm handling this—now get going,' and he shoved him out the door.

"While this was going on, I was trying to work the knife loose with my left hand; but it wouldn't budge. The pain was excruciating and blood was running down the table. Horgan came towards me swinging a hand pick. When I saw what he was going to do I screamed—but that didn't stop him. He hammered that knife in right up to the hilt. As it turned out, it was the best thing he could have done. Anyway—I passed out, and when I came to I was alone."

Charlie reached for his glass and emptied it at a gulp. McGill looked shocked. "What a devil a man can be!" he said through his teeth.

We all stared at Charlie, waiting for him to go on.

"A strange thing happens to you," he said, "when you find

yourself alone in a situation like that. At first I was ready to give up. I just sat there the whole of that first day in a sort of daze. Then in the cool of the evening I became suddenly alert. It was as though I'd been gathering myself for an effort. The pain in my arm had lessened and become a dull ache. By sheer luck the knife had gone right between the bones. Nothing vital was damaged and as my hand was pinned tightly to the table the bleeding had stopped. But what could I do? There wasn't a tool or implement of any kind to lever the knife out of those thick timbers. The camp was only about three miles from the main trail, but then it was over a hundred miles to the nearest town-ship. Yet if I stayed where I was it was simply a matter of days before I was dead. The question answered itself. Even though the trail was used only by prospectors and government surveyors, I had to get to it and gamble on being found.

"It took me two days to do what a man could comfortably walk in little more than an hour. I had to carry the table top balanced on my head.

"You won't believe it, but just when I thought I'd have to give up—that I couldn't go a step further—I burst out laughing. It's

true. I sat down and roared with laughter. Perhaps it's our saving grace that we can laugh—I know it was mine. I reached the trail and collapsed. When I came to, I found a couple of white men and an aborigine looking after me. I told them what had happened. They were prospectors and had riding and pack horses and we set out on Horgan's trail, traveling fast. But we were too late. We knew what we were going to find, and find it we did. Horgan had wasted no time. They'd camped their first night in a gully under a rocky escarpment and at the foot of it we found Angus."

Charlie had to stop—he couldn't go on. And while Dennison filled his glass we lit cigars and cigarettes. Listening to this terrible tale in an elegant room on a luxury liner seemed to emphasize the horror—to make it more dreadful still, if such was possible. No one said a word; and after a while Charlie went on.

"It looked as though Angus might have tripped going over the rocks and fallen on his head, and that was obviously what Horgan wanted anybody to think who happened by. But I was in no doubt that he'd smashed Angus' head in with a rock—and probably when he was asleep. Though we hunted all around we couldn't find it. So

while we got busy digging a grave the aborigine went off to look for it—they can see things we can't. Before we'd finished he was back with it. All we had to do now was catch up with Horgan.

"We were lifting Angus when he let out a groan. It gave us such a fright we nearly dropped him. We put him down and one of the men put an ear to his chest. He was barely alive and we'd nearly buried him.

"Well, we camped there nursing Angus until he was fit to travel. And when we set off we had to take it slowly. It was touch and go whether we could save him. But we got him to civilization and to a hospital, and he came out of it alright."

While Charlie told his story I'd been waiting for something to happen—what, I didn't know. I was absolutely certain he was leading up to something. But if this was the end of it I couldn't see what he'd achieved. I looked at Rawson—his eyes were fixed on Charlie, as though he'd been hypnotized.

"Did you get Horgan?" McGill asked eagerly.

"No—he got too much of a start. We never caught up with him and he was never seen again. It's my guess he cleared out of the country."

"And Angus—Angus MacDonald—what happened to him?"

"Oh—he went through a bad time. But then he did alright. He's married and had a couple of kids."

Charlie paused—he was smiling as he looked around, "As a matter of fact, he's meeting me tomorrow. He'll be on the dock when we get in."

Before anyone could say a word Rawson got to his feet. At that moment the ship gave a lurch and we all grabbed at our glasses. Rawson nearly fell, but he caught the table and clung there unsteadily. He looked dreadful—his fat pink face had gone the color of green cheese.

"I'm not well," he muttered, "I've got to turn in."

We watched in silence as the steward helped him to the door.

And when Charlie said, "I'm going to turn in too; it's late," the party broke up with everyone looking thoughtful.

It was a long time before I fell asleep and I seemed no sooner to have done so when I found myself sitting bolt upright. I listened but there wasn't a sound. I switched on the light—it was just after five. I couldn't imagine what had wakened me. Suddenly I realized what it was—the ship's engines were silent.

I hurried into some clothes and

rushed on deck. A raw mist hung over the surface of the sea. It was just dawn and in the thin gray light I joined a group at the rail and learned what had happened. Rawson had jumped overboard. He'd been on deck all night and when the starboard watch had last seen him he was standing outside the rail on the scupper edge. He'd jumped before anything could be done to stop him. The ship circled back and when the sun came up we lay hove to for several hours with all the look-outs manned. But there was nothing to be seen on that wide expanse of sea.

Later, when I heard the clang of the engine room telegraph and the ship was set back on her course, I could not help but feel sorry for Rawson despite what he'd done. For I was certain now that he was Dan Horgan. And as I went below I wondered why I hadn't seen Charlie among the passengers on deck. When I went in to breakfast he wasn't there either. It wasn't until nearly noon that I met him going into the cardroom. Dennison, McGill and several others were there having a drink. Charlie looked refreshed and cheerful. He'd obviously slept well, but there was something else about him—something that's hard to describe. And I don't think I was imagining it. I can only say that he

had the look of a man with a purpose fulfilled. He looked at peace with himself. After he'd told the steward to fetch us drinks, he took a pack of cards and methodically set out a hand of solitaire. I guessed the others had been discussing Rawson's death when we came in, and I could see McGill could hardly contain himself.

"Listen, Charlie," he said, leaning across the table, "that story you told last night—that chap, Dan Horgan—he was Rawson, wasn't he?"

Charlie turned a card—he took his time finding a place for it, then set it down. He looked up at McGill. He didn't say anything—just nodded his head.

"What did I tell you?" McGill said to the others.

Dennison looked at Charlie. "Of course you didn't know he'd do what he did—otherwise you wouldn't have told the story, would you?"

"I can't say that I knew," he said looking up at Dennison with a suspicion of a smile, "let us say that I hoped."

There was a shocked silence. For some time no one said a word.

"I don't understand that," McGill said eventually. "Wouldn't you have done better if you hadn't let on you knew? Rawson would still be alive. You could have handed him over to the police. You and Angus MacDonald would have got back what was stolen from you. And you'd have got heavy damages."

McGill echoed my thoughts. I wondered why Charlie hadn't.

He had gone on with his game while McGill was talking. He was obviously more interested in that than any discussion. Eventually he looked up.

"I didn't want his money," he said quietly. "And anyway, what could I have done without witnesses?"

I couldn't understand what he meant. I looked at him. For some moments he was lost in thought. His deep-set eyes had that far-away look as though he was seeing into the past. Then he said something that literally took our breath away.

"You see," he added in his gentle voice, "Angus won't be there to meet me when we get in. He was dead when I found him."



MY WIFE'S MOTHER—Mother Harnisch as she likes me to call her—has been staying with us for several weeks now and since she's just sent for her steamer trunk, it appears she'll be visiting a while longer. I really don't mind at all. Indeed, I wouldn't have her leave for the world. But I will admit I was not too happy about it at first.

The fact was that Mother Harnisch picked the worst possible time to come. That same afternoon the small novelty company I co-owned lost its biggest order and my partner, Herb Baloff, told me he was thinking about taking his loss and getting out. I had too much invested in the business even to consider that and I worried about Herb's decision during the

It was the first time I had seen her since the wedding, three years before. As far as I knew, she was very comfortable with Phil, my brother-in-law, and his wife, Barbara, and her sudden appearance in my den surprised me. I stared at her critically. She did not look like the standard illustration for a Mother's Day card. She looked more like a squirrel. Her face was webbed with wrinkles; her nose was flat and rounded; her hair was a grisly bluish-white and curled into a tight wig-looking permanent. I had not noticed her before because she was so small her head did not show above the back of the chair.

The voice of the TV newscaster woke her and she looked up at me,


PROLONGED VISIT

drive home and arrived feeling angry and maligned.

Doris was in the kitchen but I ignored her and went directly into the den where I poured myself a healthy double Scotch. Testily, I flipped on the television news to hear about the world's troubles, went to my favorite brooding chair and there was Mother Harnisch, sleeping.



A man's dilemma when his mother-in-law usurps his position as master of the house should prove, no matter what the situation, it can always change "for better or for worse" as this opus proves.



startled, with dull gray eyes. "Oh! Louis!" Her voice had a few nice cracks in it.

"Hello, Mother Harnisch," I said. She offered her cheek and I brushed past it, smelling her heavy Sweet Violets perfume. "You come all the way over from Phil and Barbara's for the day?" I asked hopefully.

"Heavens, no. Why they live over three hundred miles from here! I was on the bus for *seven* hours." She patted at her shapeless dress. "Doris invited me to visit here a while," she smiled. "Barbara's sick, poor lamb. She was never a healthy girl, you know. I told Phillip that twelve years ago but he wouldn't listen. . . . Anyway, I never did feel very much at home there. I know that's a terrible thing to say about your own son's house but it's true. Phillip has changed these past years, he really has. And Barbara—well, I'm afraid Barbara will always be a stranger to me. Sometimes I feel that you and Doris are my real children," she smiled warmly.

I smiled wanly back, lifting my

glass and then I remembered my manners. "May I get you something to drink?"

"Oh no. And I certainly hope you're not drinking *alcohol*." She regarded my Scotch intemperately. "Oh I wish you wouldn't, Louis. Alcohol is the Devil's own brew. It was almost the death of my poor Albert."

"Just one before dinner," I smiled, sipping quickly.

Doris came in. "Hi," she said. "Isn't it nice that Mother is going to visit with us awhile? I guess I forgot to mention that I invited her."

"I guess you did," I said.

At dinner, the topic of conversation was Mother Harnisch's health.

"The doctor says there's nothing wrong with me," she confided, "but I can feel what I can feel. It's my liver, I'm sure of it. So I made him recommend a salt-free diet and it's done wonders. Now I can't even stand to see salt on the table."

I was just reaching for the shaker to season my salad but Mother Harnisch snatched it from

me and dropped it into her pocket. "No," she said firmly. "Now you just try it without salt for once. It's much better for you."

I tried it without salt and didn't like it.

"You'll get used to it," Mother Harnisch assured me. "And you'll feel all the better for it, too."

I did not feel all the better after dinner. Herb's decision to sell out was preying on me and I wanted to relax over a few drinks and think out some rebuttals. But by the time I helped Doris clear the table and went back into the den, Mother Harnisch had subtly moved my favorite chair in front of the liquor cabinet and she was sitting in it watching "Grandmother Knows Best".

"Now I know just what you're thinking, Louis," she said slyly. "But you just try to do without it. Nobody ever lived to a ripe old age because they drank every minute, you know."

Nodding grimly, I settled into one of Doris' contortionist sling chairs and took out a cigar.

"Now you just put *that* away right now," Mother Harnisch commanded. "Those are the worst things in the world for you and I just can't stand the smell of them. If there's one burning anywhere in the house, my lungs pick it up and I just cough and

cough, so you just put it away."

I put the cigar away and sat uncomfortably brooding for a half-hour. Then I crawled out of the sling chair to change channels to my favorite western.

"Oh don't," squealed Mother Harnisch. "'Meet the Stars' is on now and I never miss that. Tonight they're visiting with Gilbert X. Everest. You children wouldn't remember him, of course, but when I was a girl . . ."

Our visit with Gilbert X. Everest was followed by "Amateur Time" and then two of Mother Harnisch's favorite 'story-dramas'. After that, she was tired and since she was sleeping in the den, I converted the couch for her and then Doris and I said goodnight and went into our bedroom.

I'm not a very dense person and I saw the aged handwriting on the wall.

"Alright," I said to Doris. "How long?"

She shrugged, pulling pins from her hair. "I opened the door this afternoon and there she was. She really has no other place to go, Lou. From what she told me, Barbara was very unpleasant to her. That's really the reason she left."

"Barbara shows amazingly good sense at times," I said. "You wouldn't happen to know exactly what she did that sent your mother

packing and moving, would you?"

Doris' look was eloquent. "She just wants to be helpful, Lou. And she really likes you. She's told me that a dozen times. She'll calm down after a few days, you'll see."

As is frequently the case, Doris was wrong. The next evening I came home to find one of Mother Harnisch's handcooked meals on the table. It looked and tasted like baked moss.

"Egg plant," Mother Harnisch explained. "It's very good for you. I have a recipe book that has a thousand meals you can make without meat or seasoning. That's almost three years of dinner," she smiled. "I'm sure we'll find hundreds that you'll like, Louis."

"Right now, I'd like a cup of coffee," I said.

"Mother was telling me that tea is much better for you than coffee," Doris said. "So I thought we'd try it for awhile." She caught my look. "Well, it certainly can't hurt us," she said.

"It's a special kind of dietetic tea," Mother Harnisch informed me. "From India. It may taste very bitter at first but once you get used to it, you'll never want to drink anything else."

That was true enough. I took a swallow of the tea and pushed the cup from me. "Well, I'll help you clear the table," I said to Doris,

standing up. "It's almost seven and the Bowmans expect us at seven-thirty, don't they?"

"I cancelled that," Doris said.

"Oh?" I said archly. I had an armful of plates but I signalled Doris with my eyes to follow me into the kitchen. With the door shut behind us, I said, calmly, "Why did you cancel our bridge game?"

"We can't just go off and leave Mother alone."

"We'll have the Bowmans over here then."

"And the four of us will play and Mother will just sit around and feel left out? Really, Lou."

"We'll let her score."

Doris shook her head.

"Well, send her off to a movie then." I reached for my wallet. "Here, I'll even treat her to a bag of salt-free popcorn."

Doris' head continued to shake. "She doesn't like movies. She says the crowds frighten her."

Later that evening I discovered that Mother Harnisch didn't like candy either.

Dinner the next night was broiled lettuce, cheese and chives. We had our Indian tea in the den while we watched "Austin Weem's Waltz Hour", two night-time soap operas and a special show dealing

with the problems of the aged that Mother Harnisch knew we wouldn't want to miss.

"This has got to stop," I told Doris when we were in bed. "Especially the dinners. You've got to keep her out of the kitchen."

"She has nothing to do all day except cook and watch television. What do you expect me to do with her?"

"Why don't you introduce her to some of the other old people in the neighborhood. They could form a temperance league."

"I took her over to meet Mrs. Fabell and Mrs. Zworkin this afternoon but I don't think they cared for Mother."

"I can't understand that."

"Don't be mean, Lou."

If everything else had gone well, I might not have had to be mean. After the first week I managed to compensate for my deprivations at home. I smoked twice as much at the office, kept a bag of candy in my pockets at all times, told Doris I was working late so I could eat a decent dinner out and returned home with a full glow on, after watching my westerns at a bar. But business continued to be bad, Herb became more definite about wanting to sell and, in an effort to change his mind, I invited him

over for dinner and a friendly conference.

Naturally, I had prepared Doris beforehand and we had a real meal preceded by real drinks and followed by genuine coffee. Mother Harnisch sat glumly at the end of the table, looking like a small bundle of laundry, scowling.

"What if we let Pauling go and I take over all the selling myself?" I proposed to Herb over brandy. "Would that make you any more inclined to stay?"

"Be a lot more work for you," he said.

It was the first interest he had shown and I jumped in to press. "I wouldn't mind. It would—"

"It's very cruel to fire anyone," Mother Harnisch said suddenly. "You said it wasn't his fault that business was bad. If you fire a man for something he hasn't done, it's just cruelty."

"Well, we don't like to be cruel," I said, trying to laugh it off, "but business comes first. I'm sure this man understands that." I turned to Herb. "The extra work wouldn't bother me at all. I could—"

"My Albert was only fifty-seven when they fired him," Mother Harnisch put in. "He worked for the company for thirty-two years and they fired him for no reason at all. They just told him he was too old."

"Well, I'm sure this man will be able to find another job," I said. "He's only forty and very capable. . . . Listen, Herb. We could divide the territory at Moresfield and I could cover—"

"It's a terrible thing to be old," Mother Harnisch said to Herb. "I only hope you never find out what it's like. You just sit around with nothing to do, waiting to die."

"Yes, ma'am," Herb said. I could see he was growing impatient.

"Lets go into the den," I said.

"Albert was a good worker," Mother Harnisch said, fastening her hand onto Herb's arm. "The older people are the best workers. They've proved that . . . I can remember when he got that job. He was so happy. We had only been married a few years and—"

"Well, if you'll excuse me," Herb said, standing up. "It's getting late. It's certainly been a pleasure, Doris, for a bachelor like me."

"Don't go yet, Herb. Listen to this set-up."

"We'll talk about it tomorrow," he said. "Goodnight, Doris. Thank you again. Goodnight, Mrs. Harnisch."

I caught his arm at the door. "Look, Herb, don't let the old lady upset things. I've worked this all out and—"

"We'll talk about it tomorrow, Lou. I really am tired now. Thank

Doris again for me, will you?" And he was gone.

"Such a nice man," Mother Harnisch said as I walked back into the diningroom.

"He was crazy about you, too," I said.

"I think it's nice to have a business friend over for dinner and—"

"Make him listen to an old woman rattle on about her husband," I finished.

"Lou!" Doris said.

"Why couldn't you keep your mouth shut for once?" I said to Mother Harnisch. "Didn't you have the brains to see you were bothering us?"

"Lou!"

But I was under a week's steam then and there was no stopping me. I lashed into Mother Harnisch, covering the imposition of her visit, the inconsideration of her restrictions, the atrocity of her dinners and her imbecilic taste in television programs. The insults poured from me like lava and her expression changed from disbelief to pain and finally to outrage and she turned, sobbing, and ran from the room.

There were some slight domestic revisions after that. At Doris' insistence, Mother Harnisch got her apology but with it came the Louis G. Westermere Plan for Household Restoration, a ten-point

program as carefully detailed as anything Wilson ever composed. Doris was reinstated as chief cook; the Indian tea went back in its can; salt, pepper and all the minor seasonings reappeared on the table; the liquor cabinet was liberated and replenished; the candy came out of my pockets and cigars burned almost constantly as I watched my westerns or entertained our card-playing friends.

The only area of compromise was my favorite chair. Mother Harnisch could not seem to stay away from it during the day but as soon as she heard me coming in, she scuttled to the far corner of the couch where she sat, sulking. Naturally, there were regular, almost hourly, promises that she was going to leave; but as far as I knew, no definite travel arrangements were consummated and, as Doris reminded me constantly, she really had no other place to go.

As long as she was out of my way, I didn't really care if she stayed awhile and everything would have been almost normal if Herb had not remained so adamant. But my arguments had no effect on him and late one Friday evening he called to say he had been offered a good job with another outfit and he was going to accept it the next day.

"Give me one more chance to

change your mind," I pleaded. "I brought all the books home with me tonight and I'll go over them again. Come by tomorrow morning before you go over to this other place and we can make a final decision either way."

He agreed reluctantly and I worked most of the night, figuring all possible cuts that might keep the company above water.

The doorbell woke me at ten the next morning; it was Herb. Doris, I remembered, was out shopping and Mother Harnisch was nowhere in sight so we went into the livingroom and began to talk.

It was an awkward conversation for Herb and a desperate one for me. We had been partners for five years and close friends for ten years longer and neither of us wanted to hurt the other. Like vaudeville performers, we took turns standing up and walking back and forth before the fireplace trying to make our positions understood.

"It just won't work, Lou," he said finally. "I feel badly about leaving you this way but if you're smart you'll get out, too. It's just something that didn't pan out and the only thing to do is take the loss now before it gets too big."

I tried again to make him understand that even a small loss

was too big for me, that I had all of my capital tied up in the business, that bankruptcy would ruin me.

"I'm sorry," he said sincerely. And looking at his watch he added, "It's almost noon. I've got that appointment at one and I don't want to be late for it. Why don't you give me a call next week and we'll arrange to meet with the lawyer?" He started to walk toward the door but I jumped up and stopped him, holding him with both hands.

"Just wait another minute, Herb. Listen, I've got a new idea."

"I'm sorry, Lou. It's just no good." He tried to push my hands free but I held him, desperately.

"Wait a minute! Listen!" I tried to shove him back into his chair, the rug skidded under his feet and he fell backwards, cracking his head on the mantelpiece.

"Herb!"

But even as I was kneeling, staring horrified, I knew he was dead.

"Herb!" I screamed, pulling at him. "Herb! Answer me!" But of course he couldn't.

Then a voice said: "You killed him."

It was Mother Harnisch. She was standing in the hallway that separated the livingroom from the den, her wiggy permanent mussed and her eyes still sticky from the

nap she had been taking in my easy chair.

"I saw the whole thing," she said very slowly. "You didn't see me but I was watching. You didn't even know I was there but I saw it. You pushed him and then you hit his head against the fireplace. I'm going to tell that to the police."

"No! You're crazy. It was an accident. He slipped and—"

I stopped because Mother Harnisch was smiling. It was a horrible crafty little smile of an unwanted old woman who had just managed to get a stranglehold on comfort for the remainder of her years.

"They'll believe me if I tell them," she said, nodding. "They'll believe me."

And I realized that maybe they would and that I would never have the courage to risk it.

Mother Harnisch saw that, too; her smile widened and her gray eyes twinkled like stars. But to me they were like stars going out, my tiny lights of luxury—liquor, cigars, decent food with salt and pepper, bridge, candy, westerns—all winking into oblivion.

After I called the police Mother Harnisch led me gently to the den to share one of her favorite programs, "Queen for an Afternoon."



SHERIFF PEAVY and the

The door of the Bon Air Café flew open before I got an answer, and Deputy Jerry Sealey came in like an undernourished whirlwind.

"Pete! Come on, we got to get down to the waterfront!" He touched his cap and grinned at Selma. "Eight o'clock tonight suit you?"

"That'll be fine, Jerry," she said.

"Good." He turned back to me and took hold of my arm. "Come on. The sheriff ain't gonna like it if he finds out you been loafin' around the café while he was out of town, specially when there was work to be done."

"What kind of work, deputy?" I turned and winked broadly at Selma. "Sombbody run a stop sign and you need help on the case?"

Jerry sighed and gave Selma a martyred, overworked look. "Dead man down at the waterfront. Call just came in."

He had put the bait before me and I bit. I slid a half a dollar onto the counter and Jerry and

SELMA passed the coffee mug across the counter to me. It was the worst coffee I'd had since I got out of the army seventeen years ago, but this was my third cup, and it was worth it.

I took hold of her hand before she could draw it back. "Selma, I do believe you got about the biggest, bluest eyes I ever saw, bar none."

"Pete Miller!" She smiled and showed her dimples, and with her free hand she passed the squeeze bottle of catsup to me. "Here, you'll need some of this on your hamburger."

"How about you and me going to the movie tonight?" I picked up the bottle and squeezed it on my sandwich. The catsup was watered down to about the consistency of gin. "Good movie on."

Could a shrimp boat be a murder weapon? Although the circumstances appear to be rather 'fishy' to our Sheriff Peavy, he adroitly untangles the net result and the scales of justice balance again.



I went across the street and climbed into the county car parked in front of the sheriff's office.

"Now what's this about a dead man?" I said.

Jerry started the car and pulled away from the curb. "Cal Moffatt just tied up at the shrimp wharf and he's got a body aboard his boat, that's all I know."

We drove on in silence. Finally I said, "Got a date with Selma tonight?"

Jerry grinned and nodded.

"Early bird, and like that, huh?"

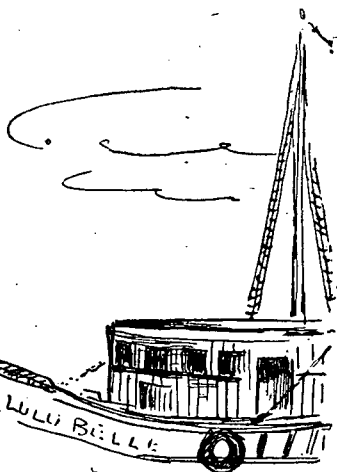
He didn't say anything, just kept

the silly grin on his face. In a few minutes we reached the waterfront and Jerry pulled up at the Sea Nymph Shrimp Company. Four or five shrimpboats were tied up alongside the wharf beyond the packing house, and beside one of them a small crowd had gathered, mostly women who worked in the

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A NOVELETTE BY RICHARD HARDWICK



packing house down by the dock.

Jerry and I got out of the car and went across the wharf toward the group. I saw Calvin Moffatt standing there talking to the crowd. He was a tall, heavy-set fellow, with long black hair combed back in the ever popular ducktail style.

When he caught sight of us he pushed his way forward. "Well," he said, "here comes the law now!" He turned and pointed toward the boat. "He's right down there on ice." He looked around at the crowd and grinned. "Didn't want him to spoil while we was waiting for you boys to finish your pinochle game."

A little nervous twitter went through the crowd.

"Very funny," I said. We climbed aboard the boat. It was an old shrimper, about 35 or 40 feet long, with very little paint in evidence anywhere. The name *Lulu Belle* was barely legible on the side of the wheelhouse. I looked around at Moffatt. "Isn't this Ed Venable's boat?"

"It was. I won it in a poker game a couple of months ago."

Moffatt pulled a hatch open on the work deck.

"There he is."

I looked down through the open hatch into the fish hold. A dark tarpaulin lay on a mound of

shaved ice, and under it an object.

"I put him in the tarp so he wouldn't mix with my catch," Moffatt said.

"How'd you happen onto him?" Jerry said.

"I run into him last night."

"Run *into* him?" I said. "You mean your boat hit him?"

Moffatt nodded. "He didn't have any lights on and I was pulling my net. First thing I knew about it was when I felt the boat hit his boat. I was lucky to find him at all out there in the dark, but there wasn't nothing I could do for him."

I scratched my head. The people crowding along the edge of the wharf were all peering over trying to get a look into the hold.

"Ain't you interested in who it is?" said Moffatt.

Jerry stopped as he lowered himself into the open hold and looked up at Moffatt. "You mean it's somebody you know?"

He nodded and let his eyes go to the dark tarp below on the ice. "It's Conroy. Old Grady Conroy."

We contacted Doc Stebbins, the county coroner and medical examiner, and had Faircloth's Funeral Home haul the remains of Grady Conroy away. Calvin Moffatt and his striker, Mac Snipes, went down to the office with us to get the story on record. When we

got there we found that Sheriff Dan Peavy had just returned from his trip south.

"Anything happen while I was out of town?" Dan said eyeing the two men we had with us.

I told him about Conroy being dead. "Moffatt's here to give us a statement now."

Cal Moffatt plopped down in the chair beside Dan's desk. "I hope this don't take long. I got to see my gal."

I took a seat at the desk. "Just start at the beginning."

"Well, like I said, I was pulling my net about dark last night. Old Mac here," he waved a hand casually towards Snipes, "Old Mac found a bottle of booze I had on board, and he was out cold."

"Cal," Snipes said, "you shouldn'ta had that stuff on the boat. You know how me and a bottle of whiskey are."

"Yeah, you damned rummy, I know. Anyhow, I was fixing to try to wake him up and pull the net in before I stopped for the night, when I heard the boat smash into something. I cut the throttle and run out on deck. I had my deck lights on and I saw this piece of a boat go by. I saw a guy in the water and I snagged him with the boathook. I had to do it all by myself, but I finally got him up and laid out on deck, and then

I seen it was old man Conroy. Well, I tried artificial respiration but it didn't do no good. He was dead.

"How long did all that take?" Dan said.

"How long! How the hell should I know! I was busy tryin' to do something!"

Dan nodded.

Moffatt looked at me. "That's it. When I saw he was dead for sure, I put him below and this morning we came back in."

"Where did this happen?" Dan said.

"We was about thirty miles north."

Dan turned to me. "What do you reckon Conroy was doing up there?"

"The mackerel have been running good. You know how he is—*was* about fishing, a real nut."

"But Moffatt says it was dark, and even in a boat like Conroy's that would be a good two hour run from here."

"Maybe he had motor trouble," Jerry put in.

"You through with me?" Moffatt said, getting to his feet.

"Snipes," Dan said to the striker, "can you add anything to this?"

"Sheriff Peavy, it was just like Cal said. I found a bottle and I was out. I come around about

midnight and he told me what happened. But I do recollect seein' Conroy's boat trolling around near us in the afternoon."

Dan walked to the window and looked out. "I reckon you two can go."

I went to the window and stood beside Dan when the two men left. They stopped and spoke for a moment in front of the office, and then Snipes walked off toward the waterfront and Moffatt headed across the street. I watched him go into the Bon Air. I heard Jerry come up behind me, but I was busy watching Moffatt. He took a stool at the counter inside the cafe and Selma stepped up before him. Moffatt said something and they both laughed. And then I saw him reach out and take hold of her hand. She didn't seem to be making any effort to pull away; in fact, she was still smiling and talking.

"Well, I'll be—" Jerry muttered behind me.

Dan turned and sat down behind the desk. "Funny thing to happen," he said.

Jerry continued to stare across the street. "He's—he's over there with *Selma*!"

I took hold of his arm and pulled him away from the window. "How come it's funny, Dan?"

"Well, Conroy was a good man with a boat. He didn't take no chances."

"Accidents happen all the time, even to careful people."

"You know about how fast that old boat of Moffatt's is running when the net is draggin'?" About as fast as a man can walk. Now how on earth could a thing like that run over a boat that way? It ain't reasonable."

"Reasonable or not, it happened," Jerry said, looking back toward the window with a frown on his face.

"Yeah," Dan said. "Well, I reckon we better find out who to get in touch with about Conroy bein' dead. You know anything about him, Pete?"

I shrugged. "Nothing except he came here a couple of years ago and rented an apartment down at Mrs. Welles' place, and bought that boat. I figured he was retired from something up east."

Dan pushed his chair back and got up. "Let's run over to his place and see if Mrs. Welles knows anything about him."

The old lady was rocking on the front porch when we got there. As it turned out she didn't know any more about Conroy's past than we did.

"All I know, Sheriff Peavy," she said, "is that Mr. Conroy is a good

roomer. He never causes trouble, he's quiet, and he pays on the first of the month."

"I'm afraid he *was* a good roomer, Mrs. Welles," Dan said. "Mr. Conroy met with an accident last night. He's dead."

It was a big shock to her. I went in the kitchen and poured her a cup of tea, lacing it with a little cooking sherry the way she asked me, and after a while she began to calm down. Dan asked her for a key to Conroy's rooms and she gave it to him.

The apartment was neat as a pin. There were a few books and magazines, mostly on fishing. I picked up a month old copy of *Sea and Stream* magazine and thumbed through it. "There was a picture of Conroy in here someplace with a mess of bass he caught down in the sound. Yeah, here it is." I held it out to Dan and he looked at it. He nodded and put it back on the table.

We went through the place, and when we were done, we went through it again. After we finished this time I looked at Dan Peavy.

"I don't get it. There's nothing here, nothing at all."

"How about the clothes?" Dan said. "Did you check the labels?"

"All of it's stuff you can buy anywhere. No custom made stuff."

Dan sat down and pulled at

the end of his nose. After a while he got up again and paced around the room. "I'll take one more look here. You go ask the landlady if he ever got any calls, or any visitors. Ask her about his mail."

Ten minutes later we were in the car on the way back to the office.

"No visitors except one or two local guys he fished with occasionally. The same as far as phone calls are concerned. And he got one letter every month."

"One letter?"

I nodded. "She was a little bit slow to admit she knew where it was from, but she came through. It was from the American National Bank, of Capital City."

I pulled the car to a stop in front of the office and Dan and I went inside. Jerry was standing by the water cooler, still frowning.

"Jerry," Dan said, "you go over to the bank and find out if Conroy had an account there. If he did, get some information about it, where the money came from and anything else you can find out."

Jerry nodded. He picked up his hat and started out. But he paused beside me and mumbled, "He's still over there talking to Selma!" Then he breezed out.

Dan dropped down in his chair and swung his feet smoothly up onto the desk. "Pete, everybody

comes from someplace. Everybody's got a past. Tell you what, you go take Conroy's fingerprints."

"His fingerprints?"

Dan nodded. "We'll send 'em to the FBI in Washington. Maybe they'll have some kind of a record on him. It strikes me that a man that covers up the way Conroy did, had something to hide."

We sent the fingerprints off to Washington, and while we waited to hear from that, something else turned up. The bank told Jerry that Conroy carried an account with them, and that he deposited a thousand dollars on the third of each month. The deposit was a check drawn on the Trust Department of the American National Bank in Capital City. A follow-through on that revealed the amazing fact that Conroy was a rich man. The bank managed his investments and sent him a check each month for one thousand dollars. The balance of his income went back into more investments, but that was all the bank knew. He had come to them two and a half years ago with a large draft drawn on a Swiss bank. He turned the money over to them, told them what he wanted, and that was that. Even his will led us nowhere. The estate was left to the Salva-

tion Army. Nothing to relatives.

"This is more than just curiosity with you, Dan," Jerry said. "What is it you're after?"

"I don't know," Dan said seriously. "Just a feeling, maybe. Too many things that are too coincidental. Him getting run down by a shrimpboat that way, and the fact that the only witness other than Moffatt was drunk and passed out when it happened."

"Anybody that knows Mac Snipes knows that ain't unusual."

"That's just it. When Moffatt took him on as striker he knew Snipes was a drunk. Knowin' that, how come he would have whiskey around? And how come he was to let him get it?"

"You mean that Moffatt mighta wanted Snipes drunk?" said Jerry.

"It woulda looked funny if he hadn't of had a striker on the shrimpboat, but if the striker was Mac Snipes, and he was drunk, then it would look normal."

Jerry perched on the edge of the desk and leaned toward Dan Peavy. "Then you're saying you think maybe Moffatt run him down on purpose, right?"

Dan pursed his lips and shrugged.

Jerry jumped up. "You're just about the most suspicious man I ever run into, Dan! The way you got this thing figured, the Salva-

tion Army hired Moffatt to kill Conroy so they could inherit his money!"

"Now, I didn't say that."

"Well Moffatt couldn'ta had any reason of his own for doin' it, and the Salvation Army is the only thing that gets any profit outta Conroy being dead! Dan, you could get real unpopular accusing the Salvation Army of murder!"

It was silly as the very devil, but I couldn't help but go along with Jerry this time. Dan Peavy was getting to the point where he suspected everything.

It was only when the report came from the FBI that I began to lean Dan's way. The report dropped in the office like a little bomb.

"Well," said Dan, "they matched up the fingerprints, alright. But they didn't belong to nobody named Grady Conroy. They belonged to a fella by the name of Gus Corelli." His eyes went down the report, his lips moving silently. Then he looked up at us. "The FBI had information that Corelli was dead, killed in a gangland feud about two and a half years ago."

"Conroy showed up here in Guale County about then!" said Jerry.

"And that business with the bank, that was about the same

time," I put in. "Isn't that right?"

Dan nodded. "Conroy, or Corelli, was a bigshot, hood up east. He was supposed to have pulled some kind of double-cross on his partner, a man named Trexler, and something went wrong and Trexler had him killed and dumped in the river."

"How did he end up here?" I asked Dan.

He shook his head, then tossed a picture onto the desk. "This is him, though." He threw out another photograph. "This is his former partner, Trexler, the fella who was supposed to have gotten him killed."

Jerry picked it up and I looked at it over his shoulder. This one was a stranger.

"That picture of Conroy that was in *Sea and Stream* magazine. You think maybe this guy saw it and recognized it?" I said to Dan.

"That's about the only thing that makes any sense."

"And Trexler came here and found a man who would give Conroy an 'accident' for a price."

Jerry smacked his hand down on Dan's desk in sudden inspiration. "That's why he brought the body back in! This guy, Trexler, paid to have the job done once before and something went wrong! So this time he wanted the body positively identified!"

"If we're on the right track," Dan said, "I think I know a way we can find out."

Dan picked up the phone and called the office of the *Clarion*. "Jim Benson there?" he said. He waited a couple of seconds. "Benson? Sheriff Peavy. You goin' to be there for a few minutes? Good. I want to talk to you. I'll be right down."

The next morning there was a story on page one of the *Clarion*. The headline read: *Identity of Accident Victim Doubtful*. The item went on to say that a body originally identified as that of Grady Conroy was now thought to be that of someone else, and that the sheriff's office was conducting an investigation.

Jerry finished reading it and dropped it on Dan's desk. "I don't see what you expect—"

Just then the door flew open and Cal Moffatt came in. He looked around at us with a strange expression, and his eyes finally lighted on Dan Peavy. He had a copy of the *Clarion* in his hand. "What's this all about, Peavy? That was Conroy I run over out there, I know it! What the hell's this business in the paper?"

"Just what it says, Moffatt." Dan's eyes narrowed and he

reached into the desk drawer. "By the way, you ever seen this fella before?"

He tossed the FBI picture of Trexler onto the desk. Moffatt looked down at it, and his swarthy sun-baked face went white. But he was quick to catch himself. He picked the picture up and made a big show of holding it to the light and musing over it. Finally, he said, "I don't think so, Peavy. There's something a little familiar about him, but maybe that's because he looks a little like somebody else."

Dan nodded and slid the picture back into the desk. I thought Moffatt was going to get back to the subject of the newspaper item, but I was wrong. He tucked the paper under his arm and left.

"Well, if that ain't something!" Jerry said. "What do you reckon shut him off so quick?"

"He recognized Trexler," Dan said. "Our friend Calvin Moffatt knows we know something, but I think he's smart enough to know we don't know enough, and he knows we know it."

"How's that?" Jerry said.

Dan passed over the question. He took Trexler's picture out again and handed it to me. "You boys take this around town and see if anybody recognizes him."

Jerry and I took the picture and

went all over town with it. We were about to give up when we stopped off at the Savoy, a little beer joint on the edge of town. Lester Jagels, the owner of the place, was back of the bar when we went in.

"I ain't broke any laws," he said when he saw us. "License is up to date—"

"Jagels," I interrupted. "Take a look at this guy. Ever seen him before?" I tossed the picture on the bar and Jagels took a pair of steel-rimmed spectacles from his pocket and looked at the likeness. He frowned, pursed his lips, and finally shook his head.

"Nope. Can't say that I . . ." He stopped and squinted at the picture. "Wait a minute now." He came around the bar and the three of us stepped outside into the sunshine. He looked at the picture and this time he said, "Hmmm."

"Hmmm?"

He nodded his head. "Humm. Can't be sure, though. It's been a few weeks back."

"Do you think you might clear that up a little, Jagels?" Jerry suggested.

"There was a fella around the place here. He was a stranger, well-dressed kind of guy. He came in three or four times. Seems like he was with one of my regular customers part of the time."

Jerry's eyes narrowed with a knowing look. "Grady Conroy, wasn't it."

"Conroy?" Jagels shook his head. "Conroy never hung around here."

"Wasn't Conroy?" Jerry said, deflated.

Jagels handed me the picture. "It was Cal Moffatt."

Jerry and I took a quick look at each other. "Could you swear to that, Jagels?" I said.

He shook his head emphatically. "Nope. Looks like the man I saw around here, but when it comes to swearing, then I ain't that sure."

We reported back to the office and told Dan of our talk with Lester Jagels.

"Well," said Dan. Peavy, "I think it's clear enough what happened. We just can't prove it."

"He's bought a car," Jerry said. "A convertible."

"And Selma's got a wrist watch he gave her yesterday," I added.

"So he got a bundle of money someplace," Dan said. "The trouble is, there's no way to prove Trexler gave it to him for killing Conroy." Dan shuffled some papers around on his desk. "I did a little checkin' while you boys were gone. Conroy kept his boat at the county marina down near the wharf. The boy down there told me it was Conroy's habit to go out

trollin' like that until his big gas tank run dry, then he'd switch over to the six-gallon can and run back in."

"You think somebody might of tampered with the extra gas?" I said. "That could explain why he was drifting around out there when he was."

"I asked the boy about the possibility of something like that," Dan said. "He told me that most of the time anybody at all could come in the boathouse and do about anything they wanted to the boats without being seen."

"And Moffatt's shrimper was tied up right near there," said Jerry.

Dan nodded. "The boy told me something else. He said Conroy was pretty upset when he found out somebody took his picture and sent it in to *Sea and Stream* magazine."

"That proves he was hiding out!" Jerry nodded his head sagely. "Moffatt was paid to kill him, that's for sure!"

"And we got everything but proof," said Dan Peavy.

"Pete," Jerry was standing at the window the next morning, staring across the street. "Pete, if there's anything I hate to see, it's a man that gets away with murder."

"Is he over there again?"

Jerry leaned close to the window. "Yeah, and he's givin' her something in a little box—" He stopped and turned around. "What'd you mean?"

"Moffatt. He must be over there at the Bon Air with Selma."

"That ain't got anything to do with what I was talking about! Pete, that man murdered Conroy, or Corelli or whatever his name was, just as sure as I'm standin' here! And it burns me up to think we can't pin it on him!"

"Got to have proof. A man's innocent until proven—"

"Then it's up to us to get the proof!" He said, slamming his fist into the palm of his other hand.

"It's up to *me* and *you*!"

I got up and went to the window. I could see them there inside the cafe. Moffatt was showing Selma something in a little box and she was smiling and saying something to him.

"She's got a date with him tonight, Pete. We could do it then."

I looked around at Jerry. "Do what?"

"Search his boat. He lives on the boat, you know, and there just might be something on there that will tie him in definite with Trexler. If there is, then we got him right where we want him! We can't get a search warrant, so it's

the only way to do it. You just can't let a murderer roam the streets like that!"

I wasn't so sure I went along with Jerry's reasoning, but watching Moffatt over there across the street, and realizing he was a lot more competition than Jerry ever would be, I finally agreed.

It was eight-thirty that evening when Jerry and I, hunkered down behind a stack of old crates at the edge of the fishing wharf, saw Moffatt leave the *Lulu Belle* and drive off in his convertible.

"We'll wait a couple of minutes," Jerry whispered, "and then we'll get on board. Ain't nobody around, so we don't have to be too careful."

Now that we were actually there, all set to make an illegal entry, I began to feel my doubts again.

"Look Jerry, this is crazy. What makes you think he's going to leave anything lying around that might incriminate him?"

"How am I going to answer that before I have a look?"

"Well . . ."

"Come on!" He took hold of my arm and pulled me across the wharf. The tide was out and the boat was several feet lower than the edge of the dock. We swung down on the rigging to the deck. The boat moved gently underfoot,

rocking in the slight swell that came up the estuary from the sound. "See if the wheelhouse door is locked," Jerry whispered.

"Why are you whispering?" I said.

He didn't answer, but instead went to the door himself. He rattled it a few times. "Locked. Hold the flashlight, Pete. Lemme have a look at that lock."

"Jerry, somebody might see the light—"

"Dammit! Are we gonna search or ain't we?"

I sighed. "Okay. Hand me the light." I held the beam on the padlock and Jerry tried a half dozen keys in it. It snapped open and we stepped into the wheelhouse. The faint odor of whiskey hung in the enclosure.

"Now then," Jerry said, "let's get busy."

We looked through the wheelhouse, the sleeping quarters, and the little galley, to no avail. There was just a lot of junk and nothing at all that seemed to have any bearing on the Conroy-Corelli case.

After about fifteen minutes, I said to Jerry, "Let's forget it. If we get caught down here it could cost us our jobs, and maybe a little stretch in the cooler to boot."

"Hold it!" Jerry moved to the open door and cocked his head.

"Somebody's coming!" he whispered.

I heard a car door slam and the sound of footsteps coming across the wharf.

"What if it's Moffatt coming back?" Jerry whispered. "Maybe he forgot something!"

"How the devil should I know!" I looked around the cabin for a place to hide, but there was none. I tried the door behind me, the one leading out of the wheelhouse on the opposite side from the one Jerry had unlocked. My fingers touched a catch and I quickly unfastened it. "Come on," I said, punching Jerry, "let's get out on deck! If it's Moffatt maybe we can get up on the wharf when he steps inside!"

We crept out of the wheelhouse and got down on the deck on all fours and waited. The footsteps came to the edge of the wharf, stopped, and then two feet dropped heavily to the deck. I felt a strange lump in my throat. I knew how a burglar must feel when a cop closes in on him, and I didn't like it.

"He'll know something's wrong when he finds the door unlocked!" Jerry whispered into my ear.

"Shut up and let's crawl around back!" I snapped back.

On the other side of the cabin, Moffatt had found just what Jerry

mentioned. He said, "Hey, what the hell!"

"*Let's get outta here!*" Jerry whispered in desperation. He headed down the deck like a sprinter from the starter's line, and the only thing for me to do under the circumstances was to go after him. He didn't seem to care whether Moffatt saw him or heard him, he just wanted to go.

Moffatt yelled something. Ahead of me Jerry's running form was a dark blur in the night, and suddenly he wasn't running any more. I couldn't stop and I smashed into him. I felt a coil of rope as my hands went down to break the fall. I was still going, with Jerry tangled up under my feet and rope all over me. I put my hand out again, and this time there was nothing. We had come to the stern of the boat, and too late, I realized there wasn't anything under me but the river.

"*Eeeeeiii!*" I yelled.

Jerry screamed out something, clutching at my leg trying to get free of the tangle of rope. There was a brief instant of weightlessness between the time I left the solid deck of the boat and dropped through the darkness toward the water, and in that split second, I knew how nice it would have been if I had used what little brains the good Lord gave me, and not lis-

tened to Jerry. The drop seemed miles.

Then we hit the water and went under. We came up together, spluttering, trying to find something to get hold of. Surely Moffatt would throw us a line, I told myself.

But I heard something beyond the boat and the wharf. It was the slam of a car door and then the screech of spinning wheels as the car tore away.

"Petel!" Jerry said, still whispering. "What happened?"

"I don't know, but I think we scared Moffatt as much as he scared us. That was his car leaving."

We managed to get out of the river and then back to the car and ten minutes later we were at Jerry's place.

"Brilliant idea!" I said, drying off after a shower. "A real brain-storm! You know we're lucky we ain't in *jail* right now? Or worse! Suppose Moffatt had a gun on the boat, he could have picked us off like fish in a barrel thrashing around out there!"

"Hindsight," Jerry said, dismissing my argument. "Here, see if these clothes fit you and let's get down to the office and find out if Moffatt's put in a complaint."

Moffatt had indeed put in a complaint. In fact, when Jerry and I got to the office, he was still there putting it in. He was standing in

front of Dan Peavy's desk, leaning forward from the waist. "You're paid to keep law and order here, Peavy, and I want my share of it! I tell you, somebody's *after* me! They were right there on my boat and if I hadn't of lit out like I did, then I just might be at the bottom of the river right now!"

Jerry and I looked at each other.

Dan's gaze went past Moffatt to the two of us standing there with our mouths hanging open.

"Did you get a look at them?" Dan said to Moffatt.

"Great big guys! Two or three of 'em! They yelled at me and then they threw something in the river. I was lucky, Peavy! I forgot my wallet and I went back to the boat for it and I guess I surprised them. They was probably gonna wait till I came in later before they —before they did it."

"Did what?" said Dan, folding his hands on the desk and giving Moffatt a puzzled look.

"Before they *killed* me!"

"Who might these people be?"

Moffatt opened his mouth and almost answered Dan. Then he shut his mouth and glared at the sheriff. It was a cat and mouse game, both of them knew that. Moffatt seemed to know well enough that Dan Peavy suspected him, and he also knew that if he kept his mouth shut there wasn't a

thing Dan could do to him.

"Sheriff," he said. "I'm a citizen, and I pay taxes. Now I want protection like everybody else gets, you understand?"

Dan nodded. "You say there was three of 'em?"

"Could of been two. It was dark and I couldn't tell for certain. But they sure made a helluva racket."

Dan's eyes moved slowly to Jerry and me. "You say there might of been just two, huh? That's interesting." He stood up slowly. "I'll have my deputies look into it right away, Moffatt. Since you're a citizen and a taxpayer," Dan smiled pleasantly at the big man. "I'll try to make sure you get what's coming to you."

When I got to the office the next morning, Jerry and the sheriff were already there.

"Mornin', Pete," Dan said. "You're just in time."

"Just in time for what?" I said.

"Just in time to keep an eye on the office for a few minutes. Jerry, run down to the waterfront and bring Moffatt back here, I want a word or two with him." When Jerry had gone, Dan said to me, "I'll be right back. Wait here for me."

I sat down at the desk and looked through the mail, then I

got up and went to the window. Behind the big plate glass front of the Bon Air I could see Selma. Watching her there waiting on counter, I knew I had more than the objective lawman's hope that Moffatt paid for what he had done.

A minute or so later the county car parked out front and Jerry and Moffatt got out. The big boy had a cocky grin on his face, and he looked over the top of the car and gave Selma a little wave of his hand. Damned if she didn't wave back, too. Then I saw Jerry on the other side of the car. He was waving at Selma. Just to keep in the running, I waved through the window.

Jerry came around the front of the car, walking very businesslike, no doubt because Selma was watching. He took Moffatt's arm to herd the big fellow into the office, but Moffatt gave a little twist and shrugged Jerry off.

I noticed the other car at just about the same time. It was coming down the street from my right, and it was moving fast. Too fast for a car right in the middle of town. It was a big black sedan, and it pulled over close to the curb and I saw a face at the window just behind the driver. Before I could even open my mouth to call a warning to Jerry, the barrel of a gun poked over the window sill,

and when the car was right in front of the office the gun started firing. There were five or six shots and then the car skidded around the corner and was gone. It happened so quickly, and so unexpectedly, that I still wasn't sure what was going on until I heard somebody yelling out on the sidewalk. I turned and ran out of the office. People were coming out of doors up and down the street, and Selma was running across from the café in that tight little green uniform.

Moffatt stood stock still, staring after the vanished car, his face white as flour. Jerry was lying on the sidewalk, groaning and holding his left shoulder with his right hand. Right away I saw the blood, all over his shirt and spreading in a big splotch across the sidewalk.

"Pete . . ." He moaned when he saw me. "Pete . . . I been hit." Selma came running up, saw him lying there, and practically threw

herself down on the sidewalk. "Jerry!" she screamed. "Oh! You poor brave boy! You've been—been—" I thought for a second she was going to faint.

"I've been shot," Jerry said, grimacing up into the big blue eyes, his face twisted with pain. "Better get Doc Stebbins—"

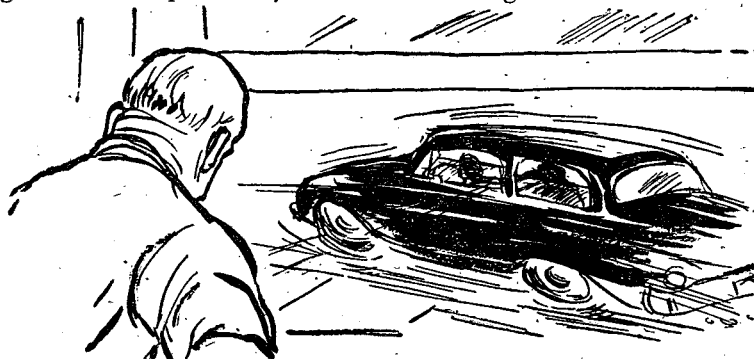
"Here I am!" Doc shoved his way through the crowd that had materialized. He knelt beside Jerry, looked at the shoulder. "Think you can stand up, Jerry?"

"I'll . . . try, Doc."

"Better get you down to my office and have a good look at that." He looked up at me. "Where's the sheriff? What the hell happened out here?"

"Gangsters!" somebody in the crowd said. "A big car full of 'em came by and started blasting away just like on television!"

"Better . . . better get Moffatt inside, Pete . . ." Jerry said with a little cough.



"Yeah, Miller!" Moffatt grabbed me. "Let's get inside!"

We went in and I was closing the door when Dan Peavy pushed through. "What the devil happened? I step out of the place for five minutes and the whole town blows wide open!"

I told him what had happened. Dan looked at Moffatt with something akin to pity on his weathered face. "You really got yourself in a bind, son."

"I told you somebody was tryin' to kill me—"

"Lemme tell you something," Dan said. "Let's quit beatin' around the bush. Me and you both know what you did to Conroy, and we know why. Trexler hired you to do it. Now it looks like Trexler's afraid that you might talk, so he's out to get you. Son, that's between you and him. That ain't police business."

"But they shot Jerry!" I said. "Can't we do something about that?"

"That's up to Moffatt," Dan said. He looked straight at the big fellow. "It looks to me like you got two choices. You can take your chances on the outside with Trexler and his gang, or you can tell us the whole story about Conroy's death and take your chances with the law. That way Trexler will be in it with you."

"You got to protect me, Peavy!"

"Pete," Dan said, disgusted, "take this bird back down to the waterfront. I don't want to see him around here again."

"You can't—"

"Get him out of here."

Moffatt rushed up to Dan and grabbed the front of his shirt. "Alright . . . alright. I did it. I'll tell you the whole thing . . ."

It was just about exactly as Dan had figured it, down to Moffatt's having tampered with Conroy's extra gas can. Moffatt was in the cooler and the authorities up east were picking up Trexler so that he could be brought to Gualie County on a murder charge.

Jerry arrived back at the office later like some kind of a hero after a battle, his shoulder bound and his arm in a sling.

"It worked out," I said to Dan, "but you got to admit you were damn lucky. If they'd killed Moffatt out there this morning you wouldn't have had anything but a dead end." I looked at Jerry. "You're lucky you ain't down at Faircloth's Funeral Home right now yourself."

Jerry grinned and nodded. I turned toward Dan, and I thought I saw something like a grin behind his wrinkled face.

"Real lucky," I went on. "The way those gunmen came roaring by, blasting away and not even hitting Moffatt . . ."

I got up from my seat and went to the door. They were both watching me. I opened the door and stepped outside. The afternoon sun was slanting across the street right onto the side of the office. Out on the sidewalk the bloodstain still showed faintly, even though the walk had been hosed down. I moved to the side of the building and went over the stucco very carefully. I inspected it minutely, high and low, and when I was finally satisfied I went back inside.

"Funny. Really funny," I said. "They fired off a good half a dozen shots and the only one that hit anything was the one that got you, Jerry. Fact is, big as the front of this building is, they never even touched it."

I stepped up beside Jerry and took hold of his bandaged shoulder. I gave it a good hard twist. Jerry burst out laughing.

"That was . . . that was you in that car doing all the shooting, Dan?"

Dan nodded. "Shootin' blanks—Doc was drivin'."

I looked back at Jerry. "All that bleeding?"

"One of them plastic catsup bot-

ties from the Bon Air," he said.

He presented quite a sight all bandaged up that way, and nothing in the world has the same appeal for a woman that a wounded hero has. Selma wouldn't give me the time of day as long as Jerry had that arm in a sling. But I could put something else in a sling by a word in the right place, because a woman also don't like being made a fool of.

"If you're thinkin' what I think you're thinkin', Pete," Jerry said, slowly shaking his head, "Don't."

"You fourflusher, why not!"

"Can't do it," Dan said. "We got to keep Moffatt thinking Trexler really tried to kill him."

"You mean . . . I can't *ever* tell anybody what really happened?"

"It'd be better if we all just kept it under our hats, Pete."

Jerry was grinning like a jack-ass eating briars. I turned away and went to the window. Across the street I could see her there behind the counter and I tried to remember what my daddy said about being a good loser. I tried to concentrate on Juanita down there at the bus station. Maybe her eyes—and a few other things—weren't as big as Selma's, but she wasn't bad. She really wasn't.

I looked around at Jerry. "That lousy coffee was ruining my stomach, anyhow!" I said bravely.



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